Sadguru Gnanananda

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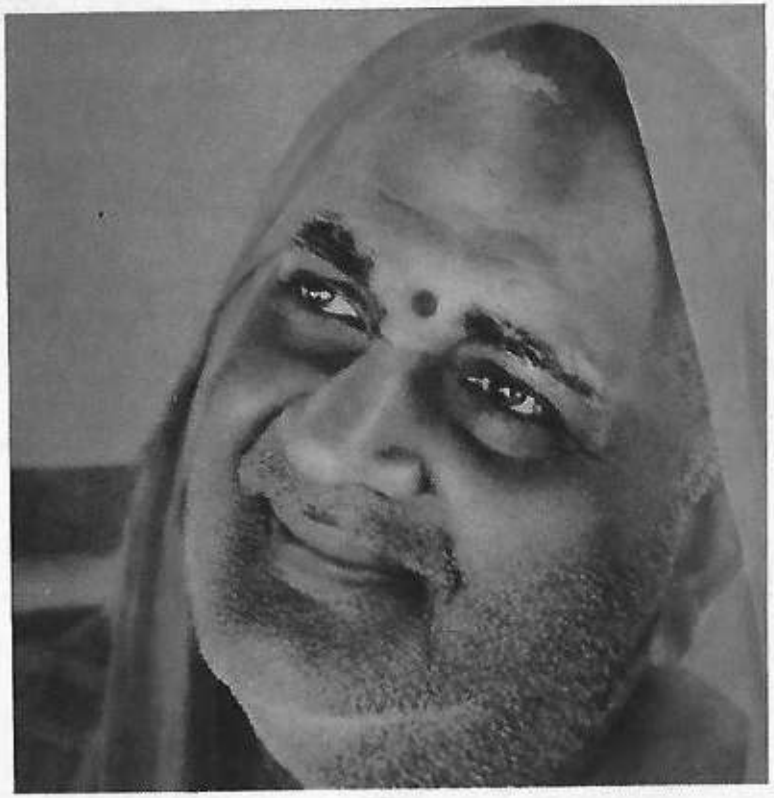

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY - 7.

SADGURU GNANANANDA

Sadguru Gnanananda is a personage of great spiritual eminence, widely travelled in this country, he settled towards the end of his life in the Tapovanam which he founded and where he instructed his numerous disciples in the several facets of Vedantic lore in a language that was at once simple and sublime.

BHAVAN'S JOURNAL
18th January 1976

* * *

The Sage's teachings are in the old Hindu tradition, but adapted to modern times and needs. They are nothing if not pragmatic and practical.

INDIAN EXPRESS
21st September 1974

* * *

Many have sought spiritual guidance from Swami Gnanananda Giri of Tapovanam. Like Bhagwan Ramana Maharishi, the Swami of Tapovanam too had a circle of great devotees who swear by his spiritual eminence.

THE HINDU
11th March 1976

SADGURU GNANANANDA

His Life, Personality and Teachings

By
HIS DEVOTEES

with an Introduction by
Dr. T.M.P. MAHADEVAN

and a Foreword by
M. P. PANDIT

1993
BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
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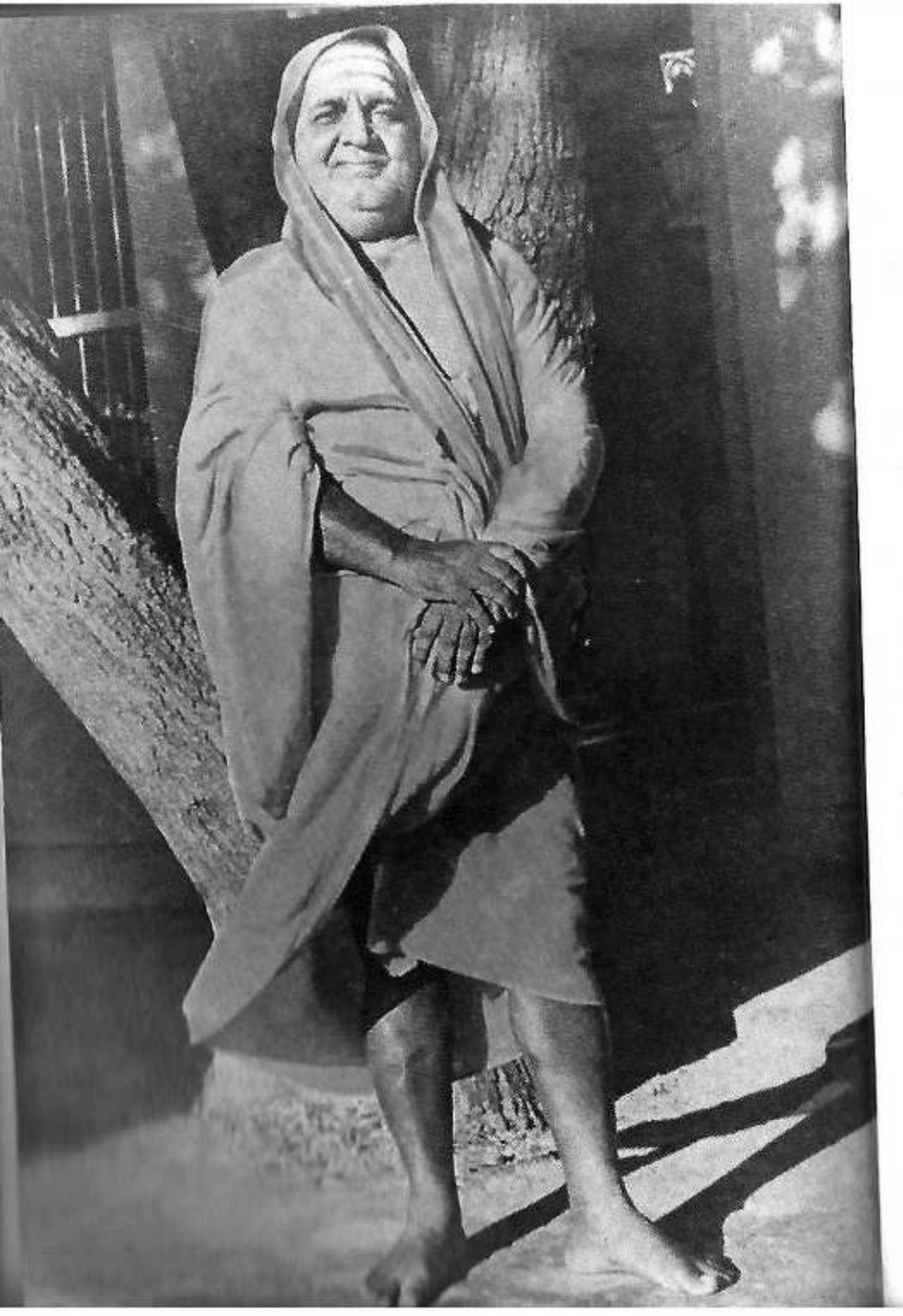

"Having assumed a human resemblance in order to shower His grace on created beings the Lord engages in sports hearing which man may be exclusively devoted to Him."

—*Srimad Bhagavatam*

DEDICATION

TRUE cosmic religion seeks to kindle man's awareness of himself in the ultimate recesses of his soul. The intuitive Beatitudes of the vedic seers of the hoary past conjure up an enchanting vision in which Man stands transfigured in the radiant beauty of self-realization. Man must and will increasingly be possessed by the beatific vision of the Self. The vedantic experience which encompasses this vision, will in ever widening circles permeate every land and clime and find a lodgement hospitable to itself in a true universality. Swami Gnanananda once gently reminded a Christian disciple that the advaitic experience is truly universal in character and can be discovered if one looked for it, also, in the Christian religion.

It was given to Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux, O.S.B.), a French Benedictine monk, to lovingly make an irresistible call to the Christian to hearken to the gentle summons of the spirit mediated to him by the ancient sages of India and in recent times by Swami Gnanananda. We have drawn a deep inspiration from his book on Swami Gnanananda titled "Guru and Disciple" and we are sure that the haunting beauty and power of his exposition would captivate the readers' hearts as it has ours. To the hallowed memory of Swami Abhishiktananda, who could recapture the transcendent beauty of the spirit, and hold aloft the radiance of self-realization to light up the path of spiritual seekers, this book is dedicated with a profound gratitude and reverence.

2. Sweetness, serenity, simplicity—these three sovereign qualities shine forth from the sannyasins of Tapovanam and cast a lovely radiance around them and suffuse those who come into their presence with a rapturous glow that is not o this earth. All conflicts and cares dissolve when one hears the spontaneous and untutored words of wisdom falling from their lips. In the sannyasins of Tapovanam these qualities have acquired a new dimension and lustre. To know them is to run the risk of one's heart being held in pawn by them, in love, never willing to be redeemed. To stay close to them is to realise that true holiness consists more in humility, sweetness and a contemplative life than in religious ecstasies and mortifications. To follow their gracious ways is to learn that the life of the spirit is the most precious and rewarding experience that one could aspire for in this God-given life. To cultivate intimacy with them is to experience the deep stirrings within oneself that signal the transformation of a fugitive desire for a life of the spirit into a lasting state, wrought by the miracle of their love. But for their unfailing guidance and help and most useful suggestions, this book would never have seen the light of the day. We would, therefore, like to dedicate this book with reverence and love also to them.

FOREWORD

SADGURU GNANANANDA is a baffling enigma to the modern intellectual but an open book with the disarming simplicity of a child of God to the common man. Swamiji swore by tradition but went beyond it in his glorious ministry spanning well over a century — nobody knows for certain how long. He breathed the essence of God-Knowledge, the *para vidya*, but amazed everyone with his grasp of the intricacies of the complex texture of the prevailing material civilisation. He would draw himself on to the summits of Brahmic Nirvana and the next moment join hilarious children on their swing. There was hardly a line of Yoga with which he was not acquainted, not a major experience in spiritual life that he had not undergone.

Gnanananda Giri may have belonged to an Advaitic tradition, *sampradaya*, but his life was a meeting ground for various traditions: Sankhya, Yoga, Tantra, Vedanta. In him fused philosophy, *upasana*, practical discipline to realise the truth of the philosophy, occultism, *gupta vidya*, and sound commonsense. He synthesised *Jnana*, Knowledge, *Bhakti*, Love, *Karma*, Action in a unique manner; he related them to the processes of purifying and subtilising the mental body, the vital body and the physical body. He taught how to organise the different vehicles, *koshas*, around their true Self, dispensing with the pseudo-self i.e. the ego. He insisted that one learn first to poise oneself in the Witness consciousness before one can hope to move into the station of the Self.

Though he held fast to the indivisible, unique Atman, the sole Self, as the goal and the Ultimate, he recognised the reality of the *bhumikas*, the several planes of existence. And he showed by the manner of his functioning that it is possible to live simultaneously on all the levels. The devout authors of this comprehensive book record many an instance of this multiple manifestation of the Divine Glory in the embodiment of the Swami.

What is his teaching, one may ask. His life itself is a Teaching. The way he received humanity, of all ages, of all stages, of all races — men, women and children — and put them through the most unorthodox disciplines of self-enlightenment, self-elevation, self-purification, is an object lesson in universal spirituality. He recognised *adhikara bheda*, variation in competence according to one's *samskaras*, past impressions, and environmental factors, and led each one in the way most natural to him. He discouraged discussions of the intellectual type and insisted upon practical orientation in day-to-day life in the mould of one's Ideal. Understanding, and living according to that understanding of one's Dharma under the guidance of the Guru is the way.

The Guru, the Grace through the Guru, effort, *purushartha*, and time, *kala*, are the four dimensions of this Journey to the Self. *Satsang*, company of the holy, warms up the process and makes one sharp of aspiration, intense in seeking. The Master founded ashrams in different places to provide for this need and established a permanent inspiration and Dynamis based upon his own illumined, ecstatic Realization of the ONE.

The Sruti speaks of *atmarati*, one who is ever in the beatitude of the blissful Self. Here is a living example. Of this Bliss Self, says the Upanishad, Love is the head, Joy his right side and Felicity the left. There you have a perfect description of Sadguru Gnanananda.

It is a blessing to read of him. A double blessing to live in his Wisdom. Let us do both.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry.
3rd January 1979.

M. P. PANDIT

PREFACE

THIS book on Sadguru Swami Gnanananda is based on the ideations of a sannyasin of Tapovanam whose creative thoughts on the Swami's personality and his essential teachings has given us the needed encouragement to embark on this venture. But for his active support and help this book could never have taken shape.

2. Dr. C. T. Indra, Lecturer in English, Madras University has gathered up his valuable ideas and suggestions and with the guidance of Prof. V. S. Sethuraman, Head of the Department of English, Post-Graduate Centre, Sri Venkateswara University, garnished them and presented them in a most readable manner. Some of the inspired writings on the Swami are by Sri N. Gopalakrishnan. Sri A. Vasudevan and Smt. Sudha Rangaswamy helped in finalising some of the important sections in the 'Teachings'.

3. Sri M. P. Pandit of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, found time amidst his busy schedule, to write a foreward for this book. His foreword, which is at once brilliant and succinct, focusses scintilatingly on the Swami's glory in its multiple facets.

4. Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan readily acceded to our request to give his very valuable introduction to this book within a short period of a week. The erudite, illuminating introduction enhances the value of this work.

5. Justice P. Ramakrishnan's translations of the Swami's speech at Ernakulam, his conversation with a spiritual aspirant from Switzerland and a letter to a devotee are at

once very authentic as also lucid and beautiful. These are in Part II of the book.

6. We have reproduced many passages from the books of Sri K. N. Subramaniam. His scholarly translation of the classic, 'Gita Sara Thalattu' is included in the Appendix.

7. Some of the translations of the hymns sung at Tapovanam have been rendered with insight and precision by Dr. C. S. Venkateswaran, (Retd.) Professor of Sanskrit, Annamalai University.

8. Our grateful thanks are due to 'Anna' Subramanyam for his beautiful Tamil interpretation of the Sanskrit sloka translated into English by Sri S. Rajaram, included in the Appendix as 'Idol of Eternal Bliss'.

9. We have also incorporated translations of many pages from the precious compendium of the discourses, letters, apophthegms and writings of the Swami, titled 'Gnana Inba Veli'. This Tamil book contains the most authentic version of the Swami's teachings.

10. We thought that the perspicacious presentation of the Swami's teachings in the book 'Guru and Disciple' by Swami Abhishiktananda, in a style which is both profound and limpid, would illumine the themes on which we have quoted him, in a way which we could never hope to improve. Extracts from 'A sage from the East — Sri Gnanananda' published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in the volume 'Guru and Disciple' by Swami Abhishiktananda are reproduced by permission of SPCK. Passages from his book 'Sanyasa', published by the Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in the volume 'Further Shore' are reproduced with the permission of the heirs of Swami Abhishiktananda.

11. We gratefully acknowledge the permission given to us by Sri M. P. Pandit for material used from his articles on yoga, extracts from his books 'Studies on the Tantras

and the Veda' and 'Sadhana'; Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan for extracts from his classic, "The Philosophy of Advaita" and his translation of Acharya Sankara's Thotakashtaka and Guru Ashtaka; Swami Satchidananda Saraswati of Holenarsipur, to include translations from "Sankara's Minor Works" published by the Adyatma Prakasha Vidyalaya and Sri T. N. Venkataraman, President, Board of Trustees, Sri Ramanashram for the extracts published from a number of books of the Ashram. Although permission was asked for only a few extracts from their valuable books, they gave their unrestricted permission for use of any material from their books.

12. We are deeply grateful to the following publishers and authors for permission to include quotations from their books: M/s. George Allen & Unwin for extracts from Jnaneshvari Vol. II, translated by Sri V. G. Pradhan; Advaita Ashram for extracts from Bhakti Yoga and Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekananda, Altar Flowers, Panchikaranam and Brahadaranyaka Upanishad; Cambridge University Press for the translation of Babu Kuhi of Shiraz by R. A. Nicholson; The Theosophical Society, Adyar for the quotations from Yogasikhopanishad and Yogatatvopanishad; Aurobindo Ashram Trust for the quotations in the text; Sri V. H. Date for the extracts from 'Brahma Yoga of Gita'; Vavilla Venkateswara Sastrulu Trust for the translations of Bhagavad Gita by A. Mahadeva Sastri; M/s. Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., for the quotation from 'Of the Imitation of Christ'; Swami Nikhilananda for extracts from his very erudite work Atmabhodha and translation of Nirvana Shatkam published by Sri Ramakrishna Mutt, Drg Drisya Viveka and Mandukyopanishad published by Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Mysore; M/s. Orient Longmans Ltd. for extracts from 'The Incredible Saibaba' by Arthur Osborne; Sri Ramanashram for quota-

tions from Upadesa Saram translated by B. V. Narasimhaswami, Kaivalya Navaneetham translated by Ramananda Saraswati, Advaita Bhodha Deepika, Tripura Rahasyam, Maharishi's Gospel, Sri Ramana Gita, the collected works of Ramana Maharishi and Bhagavan Ramana by Arthur Osborne; the South India Saiva Siddhantha Works Publishing Society for quotations from the 'Book of Meditations' by James Allen; Anandashram, Kanhangad for the quotation from the 'Silver Jubilee souvenir of Mother Krishnabai's Renunciation'; Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram for extracts from Sarva Vedanta Siddhantha Sara Sangraha; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for quotations from the translation by Sri P. Sankaranarayanan of Vivekachudamani with the commentary of H. H. Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekara Bharati Swami of Sringeri.

13. As the Swami firmly resolved to keep his anonymity unbroken, it was very difficult to collect any biographical details about him. He would not permit even notes to be taken. We therefore had to rely mostly on the accounts given by his intimate devotees. We are very grateful to them for their help and encouragement, more particularly to Smt. Leela, Sri Raghunathan, Sri A. Krishnan, Sri Namakkal S. Ramaswamy, Sri M. S. Parthasarathy, Smt. Sampoornam, Sri S. Jayaraman, Sri Sundararaman, Dr. Siddhan, Sri N. V. Raman, Sri T. S. Sivaramakrishna Iyer, Smt. Sakuntala, Sri V. Gopaliah and Sri Ananda Chaitanya.

14. Financial assistance has been received for the publication of the book from a number of devotees, more particularly from Sri Gnanagiri Ganesan, Sri A. S. Surendran and Sri A. R. P. N. Rajamanickam Nadar. We sincerely thank them as also Sarvasri Arunachalam Chettiar, P. K. Chellakkani Nadar, S. Jayaraman, Smt. V. Komalavalli, T. K. Lakshmana Iyer, Kumari Vennira Adai

Nirmala, Sarvasri C. S. Padmanabhan, R. V. Ramani, Dr. Siddhan, B. N. Srinivasan, Subramania Reddiar, K. Varadarajan, A. Vasudevan and R. Venkatesan for their generous contribution.

15. Typing a number of drafts of the book became inevitable. This has entailed a prodigious amount of typing. We have received help from Sarvasri R. Varadarajan, A. Muthiyalu, K. Veerappan, S. Swaminathan and more particularly Sri V. Ramadass, who, along with Sarvasri V. G. Parthasarathi, Haragopal, R. Venkatachalam and K. M. Raghavachari, has also helped us in a number of ways.

16. M/s. Amra Press took on the difficult task of bringing out this book in a very short period of three weeks without sacrificing quality. They have completed it with an exceptionally high measure of competence. We have also received dedicated help from Sri S. S. D. Shanmugam of M/s. Nadar Press, Sivakasi.

17. We are deeply grateful for the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for the speed with which they cleared the manuscript and the encouragement they gave us for publishing this book. Sri S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary, took special interest and extended his fullest co-operation in promoting this venture.

18. To the imaginative efforts of Sri R. K. Alwar, to whom we offer our grateful thanks, we owe all the exquisitely printed photographs and the cover design. Most of the pictures are from negatives and prints lent by Sri S. Krishnamurthy.

19. But for the dedicated and consecrated effort put in during the last two years, by Sri S. Jayaraman and Justice P. Ramakrishnan this book would not have seen the light of the day.

20. Encouragement, guidance and transmission of strength and grace to carry out this work has been received in a most liberal but totally undeserved measure from Yogi Ram Surat Kumar of Tiruvannamalai. We bow in prayer to him for his blessings.

PREFACE TO SECOND IMPRESSION

There has been a sustained interest in and demand for the book 'SADGURU GNANANANDA' among the numerous devotees who have been sharing their personal experiences and the teachings of the Swami with their friends and others around them. As a result, all the copies of the first edition have been sold out. Requests for a reprint of the book have been coming in from many quarters. This second impression of the book fulfils the need.

The cost of printing the book has been met by liberal donations from I.T.C. Bhadrachalam Paperboards Limited and devotees from abroad and in India, Sarvasri P.S. Narayanan, S.V. Inamdar, V. Lakshmanan, K. Akileswaran, Kumuda Sundar, Arati Money, Krishnamoorthy, Durgaprasad, Sampath, Ananthakrishnan and others from Canada, Sri.L. Srinivasan from Abu Dhabi, Sri.B. Jayaraman and Sri.G.R. Moorthy. Sarvasri R.K. Alwar, S. Krishnamoorthy and Aiyaswami Iyer of Bell Studios, Tiruvannamalai have been of great help in the publication of photographs. Sri.N. Subramanyan of M/s. Sudarsan Graphics has executed the printing in offset with great dedication. May the abiding Grace of the Swami guide them and bless them all!

We are thankful to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for their prompt response to our request for continuing to be the publishers of this second impression also.

INTRODUCTION

by

Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan

Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Madras

It is a privilege to have been asked to contribute an Introduction to this book written by some ardent devotees on the life and teachings of their Master, Swami Gnanananda Giri who was a great contemporary *jnani* belonging to the line of *sannyasins* instituted by Adi Sankara. Both by precept and practice he taught the truth of non-duality (Advaita). This is the truth proclaimed in the Upanishads as *Brahman-Atman*.

The well-known definition is that *Brahman-Atman* is existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ananda*). It is to be noted that such expressions are not to be taken in their ordinary sense. They are to be understood as the highest concepts the human mind has been able to evolve to indicate the nature of *Brahman-Atman*. In order to make it clear that *Brahman* is not to be confused with what are existent entities, objective consciousness and finite happiness, it is taught as being unconditioned, unlimited, infinite, impartite, all-pervading etc.

It is because of *maya* that the world of plurality appears to be real and that the soul appears as different from the non-dual Self (*Brahman-Atman*). *Maya* and its products are extremely wonderful. Although they have no

beginning, they are terminated at the rise of knowledge. From the point of view of the sage there is no *maya* at all and so it is declared that there is the destruction of *maya* through knowledge. In truth *maya* is that (*ya*) which is not (*ma*). It is only when the world is posited, that a cause for its manifestation is sought, and the cause is said to be *maya*. *Maya* cannot be separated from *Brahman;* nor can it be identical with *Brahman*. Therefore it is considered to be indeterminable. From the standpoint of the inquiring intellect *maya* is neither real, nor unreal, nor both. Wonder is its clothing, inscrutable its nature. Who is it that seeks to go beyond *maya?* It is the *jiva* the living soul. The soul is, in essence, the same as *Brahman*. On account of *avidya* (nescience) which is the individual counterpart of *maya*, it identifies itself with a psychophysical organism and is caught up in the tract of *samsara*. The souls that are caught in the transmigratory cycle are under the spell of delusion. Fixed to the giant-wheel of *maya* they revolve in *samsara;* from birth to death they go and vice-versa. The only cure for this malady is true wisdom. The reason why *jnana* or wisdom is taught in Advaita as the direct means to release from delusion is that release is not something that is to be newly gained. Release is the eternal nature of the Self. When ignorance is removed, it is realised that the soul is not an isolated individual but the same as the non-dual Self (*Brahman*).

The path to this goal is knowledge. Sankara regards this as the principal means to release from *samsara*. *Jnana* as the path to perfection should not be interpreted as intellectual knowledge but as spiritual insight. The discipline that leads to the realisation of the Self is inquiry. It consists of three phases: 'hearing' or study (*sravana*), reflection (*manana*), and contemplation (*nididhyasana*). 'Hearing' or study means the proper understanding of what the Vedantic texts teach.

Reflection is ruminating over the meaning of what has been studied and understood, with a view to removing doubts that may emerge. Contemplation is fixing the mind on the meaning so ascertained through study and reflection.

There are three main stages in the *sadhana* that leads to realization. They are *karma-yoga* the way of selfless work, *bhakti-yoga* the way of exclusive devotion to God, and *jnana-yoga* the way of wisdom already mentioned. Whatever may be their starting-point, all the three *yogas* become the constituent stages in one's spiritual journey. They are like rungs in a ladder to the Highest. In the Bhagavad-Gita we have a concise and clear account of the pilgrim's road to perfection: Dedicated action, cleansing of the heart, devotion to God, concentration and meditation, inquiry into the truth of Being, realization of that Being as one's Self and release from bondage. *Karma* means in this context, dedicated selfless action and service without expecting any rewards. This purifies the soul from egocentricity. *Bhakti* calls for complete surrender to God, meditation and concentration on one's chosen Deity. Having become thus purified and concentrated one becomes eligible to enter the realm of *jnana* and reap its fruit.

The guidance of a *Guru* is essential for one who aspires to reach the goal. *Guru*, *Iswara* and *Atman* are one and the same Reality in different forms. In a verse of the Dakshinamurti-Stotra Adi Sankara says that the one non-dual Reality appears split as it were as *Acharya*, *sisya*, father and son and other dualities. In the Upanishads there is a *mantra* which says that it is only the person that has an *Acharya* that can know the truth. It is also stated in another Upanishadic text that a disciple should approach a Master with fuel in hand (signifying the attitude of service) and seek from him the knowledge of the Self. In the Bhagavad-Gita Sri Krishna asks Arjuna:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया।
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥

"Know that Reality by prostrating before the *jnanis* and by asking them searching questions. They will instruct you — they who are the Seers of the truth." From such authoritative texts we learn how essential the grace of the *Guru* is for the seeker who aspires to reach the final goal of release from *samsara*. A beautiful definition given by Adi Sankara is to be found in his Prasnottara-ratnamalika "Who is the *Guru?* He who has realised the Truth, and who is always intent on the disciple's good".

Fortunately for us we have had an unbroken succession of such *Gurus*. Among the contemporary Preceptors mention may be made of His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha. Ascending the Pitha at the age of thirteen the Acharya has during seven decades ceaselessly endeavoured to teach all people, who come across him, by speech and example to unfold to them the blessedness of non-duality (Advaita), to make humanity realize the need for preserving and augmenting the culture of the spirit. It is difficult to reduce to words what one feels about the greatness of the Acharya. His very presence amongst us is a blessing and the comfort that countless devotees Indian and from abroad receive from his Person is inexpressible. Swami Gnanananda Giri himself has expressed his profound regard for Jagatguru Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam as follows: "His grace like the rain-bearing cloud, is showered on all people in the form of teaching on Atma vidya. People truly see him as the reincarnation of Adi Sankara Himself." This tumultuous age has been sanctified by this extraordinary Sage as it was blessed also by the recent lives of Sri Ramana Maharshi

and Swami Gnanananda Giri who lived not far from each other, the former at Tiruvannamalai and the latter at Tirukoilur. They taught the same truth of non-duality which is to be gained through Self-inquiry. It is very difficult to draw inference about the status of a sage from external observation. The authors of this book have quoted a passage from Swami Abhishiktananda's book "Guru and Disciple" where a comparison is instituted between the Maharshi and Swami Gnanananda "Sri Ramana himself never felt any responsibility with regard to those who came to him. He never considered anyone his disciple in the strict sense of the term, nor did he ever call himself the guru of anyone in particular. . ." It is difficult to understand the nature of a *jivan-mukta*. From the standpoint of the *jivan-mukta*, if standpoint it may be called, there is no duality consequently no individuality. No question arises of being concerned with others because there are no others at all. All such language as the *Guru's* concern for the *sisya* etc., are relevant only from the empirical standpoint. Although Ramana Maharshi did not say he was a *Guru* many devotees took him as their *Guru* and it is their experience that the Maharshi's grace protected them and was a constant source of solace. Swami Abhishiktananda who had great veneration for Bhagwan Ramana speaks of the Maharshi's way of teaching thus: "It was above all through silence that Sri Ramana used to share with his worthy disciples his experience and spiritual insight. . . . . If the guru keeps silence, there is between him and his disciple a communion and communication on a level much deeper than that of normal consciousness."

A feature of this work which is praise-worthy is that many citations are to be found from Ramana Maharshi's teaching.

The authors mention (page 7) that four mutts were established by Adi Sankara. Adi Sankara established

several monastic institutions of which the most important ones are at least five, each of which has carried the tradition up to the present day.

The present writer had the good fortune of having the *darsan* of Swami Gnanananda Giri at his Tapovanam quite a few times and what impressed him most was the child-like nature of the Sage as also his beaming face and soft voice. This book of absolute devotion and utter dedication of the authors to their *Sad-guru* will serve as a perennial source of inspiration for the numerous devotees of the Sage of Tapovanam.

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"LORD, you are the Reality remaining as my inmost Self, ruling me during all my countless incarnations! Glory to you who have put on an external form in order to instruct me! I do not see how I can repay your Grace for having liberated me. Glory! Glory to your holy feet!"

— *Kaivalya Navaneetam*

PART I

SADGURU GNANANANDA—

His Life, Personality and Teachings

ॐ

Chapter I

Swami Gnanananda - His Life

"SWAMI," whispered a lady devotee timidly offering him a note-book, "I have been keeping a diary (probably a record of the Swami's sayings). . . Swami must go through and. . ." trailed off the devotee, apprehensively. Then there was a moment of stillness, which looked like eternity to the devotee. "What!" the Swami exploded in a voice of affectionate amusement. "All your learning can't help you accomplish that! Deva! What can you hope to write about That which even the learned find baffling? Don't all words fall back along with the mind and intellect, failing to reach It?"

This is the anecdote that one repeatedly recalls while taking up the task of narrating even briefly the life and teachings of Sri Paramahamsa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sadguru Sri Gnanananda Giri Swami of Jyotir Mutt.

"No one can write my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see," said one of the greatest mystics of our century. Yes. What is there on the surface to see in the lives of saints and mystics? When the son of God becomes the son of Man, He too lives and suffers like

ordinary mortals. But the essential Being in him is 'the Eternal, thrown out in time as the Cosmic in the Individual for a particular purpose, use or worth'. This true person is all the time conscious of the identity with the Cosmic; and all cannot see this 'Being'.

Sri Adi Sankara Bhagavatpada Acharya, it is well-known, was one of those Avatars with constant awareness of the identity with the One and the Indivisible and He scaled the very summit of Gnana, Knowledge of Self and Bhakti, adoration of the Divine. No wonder, Swami Gnanananda Giri, coming as he does in the order of Sri Adi Sankaracharya, was himself an ocean of Gnana and Bhakti, infinite and unfathomable to ordinary men. To venture to write a life-sketch, therefore, of such a great gnani, however humble the aim may be, would definitely appear presumptuous or even ridiculous, since he has continuously defied all definitions, be it in terms of his age, his sadhana or his spiritual attainment. This book, however, is meant to awaken veneration and aspiration to 'know' in those who may not have had the good fortune to experience his Grace, and is made as an offering to the Sadguru.

The life of a gnani, a mystic or a siddhapurusha is never merely a process of time, a chronological sequence of events as it happens in most of our lives. It is even more so in the case of Swami Gnanananda. One can never say with confidence that one has understood his life or successfully bring it into the confines of history. Any attempt at writing about him is bound to be incomplete; for one thing he has lived beyond the normal span of life — more than one and a half centuries by general estimate; for another he has always discouraged any inquisitiveness about the trappings of the body and mind, about his age and 'purvasrama' or life prior to renunciation. Mark, for instance a cryptic reply by the Swami recorded by a lady devotee. "How old are you,

Swami?" asks a small girl. "Sixteen"[1] quips the Swami. "People say, you are 150 or 160. . . ." "May be. . . ." One never experiences such a difficulty while writing about other sages of this great country as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa or Sri Ramana Maharishi or even Sri Sankara (with some qualifications of course) for we have with us both their own writings and sayings and contemporary accounts of their lives and sadhana. Swami Gnanananda Giri, on the other hand, seems to have passed through bewilderingly varied and fascinating kinds of experience in his life so that one can never hope to say anything about him with a sense of finality. We cannot 'fix him in a formulated phrase'.

Then why do we attempt it? However incomprehensible and impossible, it is natural that the finite aspires to know the Infinite. Thus, to the queries of pestering and pertinacious devotees, the Swami has given answers now and then as we saw above, but in a highly metaphoric and symbolic language, giving clues and hints, leaving the disciples to guess the rest. To naive questions about his age, which has always been a point of wonder for devotees, at home and abroad, the Swami has given evasive replies; for in the renowned Hindu spiritual tradition, the body, with its physical and vital aspects, has itself been regarded, on the one hand, as immaterial and on the other as the temple of the Divine.[2] Thus its ageing process is known to have been conquered by certain yogic disciplines and powers by many rishis. The Swami has consistently answered his disciples that they would do well to direct their efforts and Bhakti towards realizing the Higher Self which is the Ultimate

[1] 'Sixteen in a Hindu mind recalls Lord Siva's offer of immortality to Markandeya when he was sixteen. The Swami indicates that he is the timeless.

[2] 'Deho Devalaya Proktah'. Swami himself says: 'The body is the temple of God' — Guru and Disciple, p. 81.

Reality, instead of looking back and frittering away their energy in such futile questions about his age and other externals.

The Swami's previous history is shrouded in mystery for everyone. Swami Gnanananda himself was always very reserved when speaking of his former life. 'What was his age?' was the most natural question. "Most people said" writes Swami Abhishiktananda, "that he was a hundred and twenty years old. Others, by astrological calculation, made him out to be one hundred and fifty three. But how could one believe he was so old when he was still so alert, walked so briskly, and drew his own water from the well for his morning bath? He enjoyed good health, directed every smallest detail of the ashram life, and supervised any new building project. His face was smooth and without a trace of a wrinkle. Looking at him one could hardly have believed he was yet seventy."[1]

Swami Abhishiktananda humorously records what a devotee had told him: "In fact, he knew Auveyar, the poetess of the Sangam, sister of Tiruvalluvar. And Auveyar lived twenty centuries ago!"[2]

He goes on to ask in dismay and humility: "What plane are we now operating on? When a jnani speaks, do we ever know on what plane he is communicating with us? The prophet's vision of the future and the sage's view of the past can no longer be contained within the cycles used to measure the world of phenomena. Is he speaking to us on the plane of the atman, the sole reality? Or is he using the language of appearances so as to be within the grasp of his audience? The atman, is non-born, the atman is everywhere transcending time and space. This individual form

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 44.
[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 45.

that we speak of as the body of such and such a jnani, does not seem to him his own any more than any other form belonging to the created world whether human or something else. In fact, is not the term jnani rather deceptive? In essence it implies particularization and therefore distinction between the jnani and the so-called ajnani and that does not really make sense when regarded in the light of the atman.

In truth the man who has realized the atman is everywhere and lives for ever. He is the young Ramana fleeing towards Arunachala and he is also the priest who fed him on the way. He is the hermit who meditated in the forest in the days of the rajahs and he is the sannyasi who met Auveyar. He is Yajnavalkya who revealed to King Janaka the Upanishad of Being, and he is the rishi who in primordial times heard the Vedas. Is he not Shiva himself seated under the forest banyan tree, clothed in his tiger skin, and casting a withering glance with his median eye at Kama, alluring Love, who was trying to distract him — or another day giving silent instruction, Dakshinamurti, to Brahma's four sons who did not know the highest wisdom? He is the Without-Form, the Non-born, who shows something of himself in every form and appears afresh in every birth.

Then Vanya said, 'What does it matter if we know whether Swamiji is fifty or two hundred or even four hundred years old? Will knowing that give us moksha, salvation, the vision of the One who is? Why should we bother to know what he was yestereday, what he will be tomorrow, where he was sixty years ago, or where he will be in a hundred years time? Even if we speak in human terms, is it not true to say that he appears before us at this time and on this day first and foremost as the one through whom the liberating word and call of the Lord to our inmost depth reaches us? Surely most important of all are the

things he says to us and the way he looks into our hearts. This very mystery which he allows to shroud all that is other than the present moment seems to me to be his way of impressing upon us his most important lesson, that the only moment that really matters is the one when a man becomes 'aware of the Self'."[1]

Based on various anecdotes and a few casual remarks of the Swami himself, it is learnt that the advent of Swami Gnanananda must have been sometime early in the last century. It is believed by many of his devotees that he was born in the month of 'Thai' of Tamil calendar (January) with the birth star of 'Kritika', in the village of Mangalapuri in the North Kanara District of Karnataka State, to an orthodox Brahmin couple, Sri Venkoba Ganapati and Srimathi Sakku Bai.[2] Here is one instance of his humorously describing his parentage: "Swami was born in Mangalapuri, at least that is what people believe. He was the last child in the family. Even now the descendants of that family are there. . . .". Let us not miss the curious note of impersonality and wit in this account.

He was named Subrahmanyam. The religious function of his investiture with the sacred thread and initiation into the Gayatri Mantra, 'Upanayana' was performed by his parents when he was seven.[3] He seems to have left his

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 45-46.

[2] "MANGALAPURI SAMBHUTAM, MANAVADHITA MANGALAM VENKOBA SAKKU JAJVALYAM JYOTIM VANDE JAGATGURUM." says the Gnanananda Ashtaka, sung in his presence every day.

[3] Arumugha Patthar of Edappadi, Salem District, with whom the Swami stayed for a considerable time, states while recording this, that the child was sent to school by his parents on an auspicious day to learn his mother-tongue, but despite importunities, did not evince keen interest in his studies! Swami later became famous for his erudition! Compare the efforts of the brother of Bhagawan Ramana to school young Venkataraman.

house at a very early age, perhaps when he was eleven or twelve. Was it the urge to know the Self that drove him to that ancient and famous pilgrim centre in Maharashtra State, Pandharpur, where he offered worship to Lord Panduranga? One does not know. It was to this hallowed spot, however, that he was led by a divine light and it was there that the disciple heard the call of the guru.

One night when he was sleeping in a mandap on a sand dune on the banks of the sacred river Chandrabhaga, he was awakened by an old brahmin who expressed his appreciation of the boy's spiritual quest and informed him that a saint destined to be his guru was right there at Pandharpur and that he could join him[1]. Subrahmanyam was disappointed when this strange messenger who had gone for his bath in the river failed to come back. Slowly realising that it was the Lord himself who had guided him in this mysterious manner, he made enquiries in the morning and learnt that Sri Swami Sivaratna Giri, of Jyotirmutt, one of the four mutts established by Adi Sankara himself, was camping in the city. Driven by his own urge to find his guru and attracted by the grace of the seer, the boy eagerly ran up to Sri Swami Sivaratna Giri and offered salutations to him in the traditional manner and stood visibly moved in his august presence.

It is significant that this is one of the very few events of his life on which the Swami chose to comment. More important still is the way he was moved to tears by Bhakti, for all his being a gnani, whenever he referred to this in-

[1] When a film of Pandharpur, shot at his request by his disciples, was being shown to him, he suddenly interjected with great warmth of feeling — as was his wont whenever a reference to his guru arose — "Do you see that sand dune over there. It is still visible. . . That is the exact spot where the Swami was." Later he referred also to the hallowed steps of the temple of Panduranga.

cident. References to his master by the Swami were rare and invariably brief and even in those precious moments, emotion surged in his heart and obstructed the flow of words. It is appropriate to recall here what the Swami had to say describing the most important event of his life when he offered himself to his guru: "This world is a river in spate with strong currents of strife, sorrow and agony threatening to engulf us. But good fortune it was that rescued me from these dangers and seated me firmly on the effulgent rock of Sivaratna. His Grace enveloped and took full possession of me in time before I was drowned. My master was waiting for me under a tree on the shore and the powerful glow of his eyes drew me automatically to him like a magnet.' It was as if the guru and the disciple were waiting for each other. Grace brought them together. It was a spontaneous and absolute surrender.

It is said that he who chooses the Divine has already been chosen by the Divine. Sri Swami Sivaratna Giri, it is interesting to note, appears to have looked as though he did not know who this sobbing, sapling of a boy was and what he wanted. The boy, overwhelmed by emotion, begged the Swami for permission to render personal service to the master. Sri Swami Sivaratna Giri acknowledged his profound devotion by commanding him "Keep my 'Kamandalu' (*water pot*) ever filled with 'theertha' (*holy water*)". and thus bid him do intimate personal service. Soon impressed by the boy's burning 'vairagya' or dispassion, his 'prapanchavirakthi', astonishing indifference to the material world, his inborn fascination for spiritual life and intense aspiration for Self-Realisation, Sri Swami Sivaratna Giri accepted him as his disciple and named him 'Pragnana Brahmachari'.

Swami then followed his guru, Sri Swami Sivaratna Giri, like a shadow and derived great delight in serving him.

There is a valuable reference to the kind of absolute devotion with which he served his master. Partly in his characteristic vein of irony and partly seriously, Swami used to chide his disciples whenever they were found to be lax or indifferent in their work and tell them how he, as a disciple, would do all the menial duties to his master with great love and devotion.

Under the guidance of his guru, the Swami not only became proficient in 'Ashtanga Yoga' but also learnt all the texts of Hindu scriptures. Constantly engaged in reflection and contemplation of the Upanishadic truths, the Swami was steeped in intense spiritual sadhana. The years spent by him under the tutelage of his Guru were doubtless replete with scintillating episodes of joy and experience.

When our Swami was about thirty-nine years old, Swami Sivaratna Giri indicated to his disciples his intention to shed his mortal frame. Shortly thereafter, 'Pragnana Brahmachari' was initiated by his guru in the traditional manner into the 'Giri' order of Jyotir Mutt and was given the 'Diksha Nama' or monastic name of 'Sri Gnanananda Giri' and the 'Danda' (*staff*), 'Kamandalu' (*water pot*) and saffron robes.[1] Sometime later, Swami Sivaratna Giri attained Mahasamadhi as forecast by him, in his eighty-first year, on the full-moon day in the month of 'Chitra' (*April–May*). The anniversary of this event is celebrated even today with eclat as his commemoration day at Tapovanam, Attiyampatti and other ashrams established by Swami Gnanananda.

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[1] Swami laid great emphasis on the importance of lineage — Guru Parampara. (*Gnana Inba Veli*, p. 168). In all documents he made it a point to record his name as "Paramahamsa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sri Gnanananda Giri Swami, disciple of Paramahamsa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sri Sivaratnagiri Swami, belonging to the Kashmir Jyotir Mutt Peetam of the lineage of Adi Sankara Bhagavat Pada."

Swami Gnanananda Giri adorned the Peetam for some time. However, by nature averse to exercising any worldly powers which would impede him in his efforts at realization of the Self — "His teaching is fundamentally the way of total renunciation so that finally there is no ego left to manifest itself"[1] — he nominated one Ananda Giri in his place and retired to the remote heights of the Himalayas for intense penance. He seems to have spent many years at the sacred spot of Gangotri, the source of the Ganges, and in the icy caves of the Himalayas, in contemplation and meditation. A devotee records how even decades after leaving the Himalayas and coming down to the Deccan, the Swami would pour buckets of water over his head in the hot afternoons. After a long period of seclusion the Swami travelled extensively on foot, spanning the whole of India and Tibet, Nepal, Burma, and Sri Lanka, where he visited many Buddhist viharas. He seems to have trekked Mount Kailas not by the traditional route, but by a more hazardous short-cut across the snow clad peaks. During the course of his pilgrimage, he met many men of God. He visited many samadhis where the physical remains of gnanis have been laid to rest. He would speak ecstatically of their glory and would often point out that the spiritual emanations from them would help aspirants significantly in their sadhana and contemplation. He held the samadhi of his own guru in special veneration and visited it often.

It is indeed amazing to note the intimate and accurate geographical knowledge that the Swami revealed about many places while casually talking to his devotees. He used to describe vividly his stay in the jungles of Bhutan, Assam, Burma, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and in the caves of Kanjan in the then Mysore State. He talked of rivulets

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 15.

which were there once in some parts of the land but have now no traces left of them, leaving us to wonder again about his age. His extraordinary proficiency in various languages such as Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam, Kanarese, Telugu, etc. was only matched by his extraordinary memory. His off-hand and extempore rendering of many verses in these languages during his conversation charmed his disciples and left no doubt about his extensive travel in North and South India.[1]

Towards the close of the last century the Swami is believed to have returned to South India. He must have completed nearly a hundred years by then. The Swami was reluctant in disclosing anything about his earlier life. In fact, his life before he came to Attiyampatti in Salem District is shrouded in mystery. Intelligent conjectures in the light of occasional remarks that have escaped from his lips indicate with certainty that during his wanderings all over the country in the typical Hindu tradition of a Paramahamsa Parivrajaka, sannyasin or wandering monk, he seems to have met many of the saints and mystics of the last two centuries. For instance, he confided to Swami Abhishiktananda that he had talked to the great Sai Baba of Shirdi, of whom he used to speak with warmth. On another occasion he mentioned his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda. He also made references to his meeting Sri Ramalinga Swamigal at Vadalur and his discussing spiritual matters with Sri

[1] For instance, while explaining in a casual conversation the significance of the japa of 'Soham', he quoted two songs in Hindi, "Soham, Soham, bol re Maina", "Hum Aksharse swas utavo, so ja, jage bitavo re", a poem from Telugu 'Hamsa Panchakshari mantram, Parama hamsaluke japa sutram', apart from quoting Tamil and Sanskrit scriptural texts.
(*G.I.V.* p. 436)

Aurobindo at Pondicherry. The Tamil poet Sri Subramanya Bharatiar is said to have met the Swami at Pondicherry and eulogised him in his verses as 'Gnana Desika' or 'teacher of knowledge'. Bharatiar refers to the Swami as 'Kulla Swami' or 'short-statured swami'. At the turn of this century the Swami was staying in the Sampath Giri hills near Polur in North Arcot District. As was the practice among the wandering monks in those days, he used to assume various names which would help him to move about incognito. It is believed that at Polur he was known as Nijananda and he initiated into the monastic order one Achuthadasa who at that very moment attained Nirvikalpa samadhi,[1] the great mystical experience of Advaitic spiritual discipline. Achuthadasa attained Mahasamadhi in 1902. His musical compositions in Tamil and Sanskrit reflecting the rapturous state of Advaitic Bliss are very instructive and popular and the Swami used to listen to them spellbound whenever they were sung by devotees.

The Swami used to mention that during his stay at Sampath Giri Hills around 1910 he would frequently visit Sri Ramana who was then a young boy practising meditation in Virupaksha caves and spend hours with him. Yogi Suddhananda Bharathi also mentions meeting the Swami in Kolli Hills as well as in Tiruvannamalai.

It is difficult to assess for how many years he had been travelling or give a chronological account of his pilgrimages. 'Nepali Swami' who attained Mahasamadhi some years ago in Sirkazhi in Thanjavur District was a contemporary of the Swami even during his years of penance in the Himalayas and accompanied him in many of the pilgrimages throughout the length and breadth of this country and Sri Lanka. From him and also from the Swami's casual

[1] See Foot Note on page 24.

reference one could gather that before coming to South India the Swami spent many years in Triconamallee, Kadirgamam, Hattan and Sivanadipadam in Sri Lanka. He visited various important shrines at Kanyakumari, Guruvayur, Kuttalam, Tirichendur, Rameswaram, Madurai and other places and reached Kallakudi in Trichy District.

The Swami, was an ideal Sannyasin, having great love of obscurity. Wherever he settled down for sometime, the effulgence of his personality would soon draw devotees who would provide facilities for his stay. His love of solitude, however, would impel him to disappear one fine day and retreat to some distant spot.

It is interesting to note that wherever the Swami stayed, even for a short time, however arid and poor the place, it would soon become fertile and prosperous. We have the famous instance of an obscure village like Kallakudi becoming a big industrial town. The Swami himself recalls to a young devotee what happened in Kallakudi. He was staying there for some time (probably between 1923–32 according to a devotee's account) and people would come offering pranams. It was essentially an agrarian village. Little did one realize that it would turn out to be the big Dalmiapuram of today. But the Swami predicted it — the trikala gnani that he was. When the simple village peasants were asked to surrender their lands to the Government for building a factory, they hastened to the Swami and complained to him that they were being dispossessed. The Swami pacified them and explained to them how in the future the place would turn prosperous bestowing on them all a far better life. The villagers obediently surrendered their land. As blessed by the Swami, the little remote village expanded into a vast industrial township as we know it today. Soon after, the Swami left the place. He tells a young devotee

(who has recorded many interesting episodes in a simple and vivacious manner) that the Swami could not stay in one place for long and so had to leave Kallakudi. When the devotee protests that he should not leave his present abode, he replied metaphorically: "When the fledgelings learn to fly, the mother bird deserts the nest and goes away".

When he was in Kallakudi he seems to have had long hair which was all matted (actually there is a photograph of the Swami in Kallakudi Ashram with long jatamudi) and he used to stretch the 'drum-stick' like locks, after a bath in the river, spreading them on a coir cot. But soon after coming to Siddhalingamadam, he is said to have got it removed.

He stayed for some time in Sulur, during the year 1927. Inhabitants of Sulur still recall his visits to their town with jata, thick and incredibly long matted hair almost sweeping the floor.

The Swami spent about thirty years in Attiyampatti (Salem District). While the Swami was in Attiyampatti, he used to visit Edappadi, Coimbatore, Bhavani, Palni, Siddhalingamadam and other places, on persistent requests from devotees who flocked around him. He established the 'Sri Gnanananda Ashram' there for which a big building was also constructed in 1930. The common folk in that village were mainly poor weavers who were taught the basic tenets of Hindu religion. The Swami also used to conduct classes in Vedanta for people who were more proficient. Most of the details about the Swami's earlier years spent here, we owe to his devotee Sri Chinna Arumuga Patthar. Swami's catechism on Vedanta imparted to him, appears in GNANA INBA VELI, that sacred collection of Swami's teachings.

His periodical visits to Siddhalingamadam in South Arcot District even from the end of the last century culminated in his permanent settlement there in 1944–45. We get consistent, reliable account of the Swami's life only after his arrival in Siddhalingamadam.

Siddhalingamadam is a village situated at about six miles from Tirukoilur and twenty six miles from Tiruvannamalai on the southern banks of the river Pennar (*Pinakini*). This part of Tamil Nadu is known to tradition as a place sanctified by the presence of great saints through the centuries. The holy hill of Arunachala casts its glow on this region. The very name Siddhalingamadam is significant and suggestive of its ancient association with siddhas and seers. Its spiritual potency attracted Swami Gnanananda as it did many saints earlier. There is an ancient temple here dedicated to Vyaghrapada. First, the Swami lived in this temple and begged for alms in the traditional manner of a sannyasin. His only clothing was a koupina or loin cloth. His ashram in Siddhalingamadam was a simple one and the atmosphere serene. There were invariably a couple of devotees staying with him. Devotees gathered around him and prevailed on him to live in an old shed. Slowly it grew into an ashram with a small cluster of modest dwellings in the centre of the village near the temple. The Swami ceased to observe silence out of compassion for the devotees and began to answer their questions. Strangely enough he was known here first mainly as a medicine man — 'Vaidya Swami' — as he was treating the physically afflicted by herbs and siddha medicine. As he made himself more accessible to devotees, his fame as a gnani spread far and wide and people came in search of him from distant places to seek his advice and obtain his blessings.

Once when Siddhalingamadam was severely affected by famine and drought, the villagers importuned the Swami for his grace. Jokingly he ordered them to bring many pots

of water from the nearby well and pour it over his head. Even before a few pots were thus poured, the sky became overcast with thick dark clouds. It poured and poured and the heavy rains continued unabated for many days bringing prosperity and plenty to this region thereafter.

At this time, recalls a devotee, the Swami was looking fair, lemon yellowish, radiant and smiling, not very tall, nor short either, plump, with a little tummy. Though the gums were toothless he looked remarkably young. He wore his ochre robe in the traditional manner bringing it over his head. He would get up very early in the morning and take his bath, energetically pouring water over his head from the well (sometimes one of his devotees would draw water for him). He would relax in an easy-chair in the central hall of the ashram and would be lost in ineffable peace and profound silence when none dare disturb him. After the early hours of meditation he loved to mingle with the children who were staying with him, delighting in answering their simple questions in half serious, half jocular way. But very often he would be transported to a realm which was utterly incomprehensible to the children. He would be making gestures with an enchanting smile, probably in communion with people elsewhere. He would recount to the children with great gusto, the places he had roamed all over the sub-continent, describing the landscape, the climate and the landmarks. One could see how proficient he was in most of the southern languages. He would quote profusely from the lore of the siddhas. Whenever people who came to have darshan initiated a discussion on Vedanta, the Swami would make them dive deep into Vichara — self enquiry. It is interesting to note that in the nights the children would sometimes find him missing from his bed for hours; later they would hear footsteps and see the Swami coming in. He would jokingly tell them that

he had been to Tiruvannamalai to see his parents or some other place far away. Evidently he was at the Kali temple, performing severe penance. Devotees also mention of his usual astral voyages. Swami would narrate to the children the purana behind the Siva temple in Siddhalingamadam: It was once a thick forest where siddhas used to roam. A king, while hunting, had struck an arrow on a bush which strangely enough started bleeding. On reaching it, they found a linga. The king built a temple and offered worship. The linga even today bears the dent caused by the arrow. The Swami explained that the linga was nothing but a siddha who had sat there in nishta or meditation. The Swami would narrate many such interesting and amazing things about people and places. Life at Siddhalingamadam was simple and austere; an organic homogeneous one. The ashram was more like a family with the Swami personally attending to the needs of the inmates, particularly those of the children as if he were their mother.

The circle of devotees coming to Siddhalingamadam was widening day by day. In 1954, a famous lawyer from Tirukoilur and his wife offered the Swami some lands situated on the northern banks of the Pennar, about two miles from the town. The Swami, who had already marked the special spiritual potency of this place, in which was a cluster of five old mango trees, readily accepted the offer. He built a modest ashram named '*Sri Gnanananda Tapovanam*' and was frequently visiting it.

Tapovanam was then a rather desolate and forbidding place, even believed to be haunted. We hear how the inmates were mortally afraid of stirring out after sunset. The Swami would keep vigil in the nights, stick in hand, driving away evil spirits, while people inside would be cowering in fear their terror unrelieved by the rhythmic noise of his

sandals. They would hear eerie sounds, shrieks and piercing cries; the Swami would come inside now and then, and ask them not to be afraid. He would be vigorously pacing the floor, combating the dark forces. Gradually the place became exorcised of all evil spirits.

The Ashram too was slowly expanded. It came to be surrounded with rich green foliage studded with a cluster of huts. Tirukoilur, as the name indicates, is a 'town of sacred temples'. The largest and most famous is the one dedicated to Maha Vishnu in his avatar as the 'Trivikrama'. The place has further associations of divinity as it was here that the vision of the Lord was granted to the first three Alwars, Vaishnaivite saints. This was the place where Sri Vedanta Desika, the greatest of Vaishnavite philosophers, had divine blessing and inspiration. The Siva temples of Veerattaneswarar and Atulyanatha again have sacred associations with the memories of 'Nayanmars', the Saivite saints. Besides, the very famous 'Jiva Samadhi' or 'Brindavan' of Sri Ragothama Swami, the great Madhwa saint, is on the northern bank of the river Pennar, only one and a half miles away, from Tapovanam. It was in Tirukoilur in recent years that Bhagawan Sri Ramana, who as the young Venkatraman fleeing from his father's house had the vision of the incorporeal light streaming forth from the holy hill of Arunachala. On a clear day, if one looks northward west from Tapovanam, the silhoutte of 'Arunachala', the hill of the holy beacon, would burst into view.

Such was the charm of the place the Swami chose to establish a full-fledged ashram, after decades of wandering.

One could see the Divine plan in the establishment and growth of Tapovanam within a few years of the Mahasamadhi of Bhagawan Ramana. Spiritual aspirants could hear the teachings of Swami Gnanananda, which were

very close to those of Sri Ramana; for they both taught the path of self-enquiry.

Here he attracted visitors, devotees and disciples from far and near, turning atheists into believers. Talking of his own 'conversion' a disciple recalls: "When I was a young man I respected neither faith nor law and was the despair of my parents. . . . .now in spite of my education, my position and fortune, I know no greater joy or honour than that of prostrating before the sadhus and serving them. . . ." This transformation, says the devotee, is due entirely to the Swami. "Through him I have found God."

The Swami, with his incomparable grace and compassion, performed many miracles, saving disciples from accidents, curing children of diseases and so on.

"His blessing is always upon us" says a disciple, "and often we have tangible proof. One day my child was at the point of death. . . . Finally it was just a matter of time. As there was nothing I could do, I took my car and rushed to the Swamiji. He would at least give me a little strength to bear the trial. I arrived, prostrated and sobbing. told him what had happened to my son. He raised me up and looked at me with the same eyes full of compassion that you yourself now know. He then replied: "Your child? Why are you so anxious? He is very well now." I refused to believe it, but he insisted and told me to return home immediately. When I arrived, my child was out of danger."[1]

Till his Mahasamadhi the Swami stayed there, never even temporarily shifting to Siddhalingamadam after 1966. The Swami had marked this place for a regular ashram — a place of organised living, prayer and yoga — unlike the other places where he had stayed earlier. He built temples for the deities of Gnanaganesa, Gnanaskanda, Gnanapurisa,

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 42.

Gnanambika, Mahalakshmi, Venugopala, etc. He made provision not only for sannyasins, but for the lay as well to pursue the Godward path. Common prayer and common worship, through singing of hymns, and stress on guru bhakti have been the marked features of life at Tapovanam. He made it a nucleus of divine life. Being an adherent of Jyotir Mutt, where it is believed Sri Vidya pooja was inaugurated by Sri Sankara himself, it is only appropriate that the Swami showed great veneration for Adi Sankara and introduced pada puja as a leading form of worship at Tapovanam. The Swami would personally participate in this pooja and other forms of worship. In fact, at the first chime of the temple bell at 4 a.m., the Swami would initiate the pada pooja with the 'Deepa jyoti', a procession led by a young girl carrying a lighted 'kutthuvilakku' (lamp) in hand. The procession would circle the various shrines and mandapams in the ashram. The Swami leading the congregation in an exalted mood, was always a marvellous sight to watch. The dense foliage of trees above, with the faint light of dawn peeping through it, the lamp held in the hand of the leading child illuminating the face of the Swami, and the musical chants fitted for the morning hour, would all leave an unforgettable memory. People would offer 'arati' to the Jyoti and to the Swami and in turn would be rewarded with prasadams and the wonderful smile of the Swami. Blessings would flow from his deeply peaceful face, his shining eyes filled with tenderness and affection. He would then participate in the 'Pada Pooja'. instructing his devotees to sing with bhakti the various hymns in praise of the *Guru Parampara*, the Guru Padukas and the greatness of the Master himself. After offering tirta prasadam to his devotees at the Venugopala Sannidhi at the end of the morning pooja, he would request them all to go and take their food at the dining hall and

only then would he retire to his room for some rest.

The robust energy that the Swami displayed in all his activities for over two decades at Tapovanam was a source of mystery to the devotees as well as the curious onlookers. Age did not impair him; nor time with its stealing steps claw him in its clutch. Everyone believed that the Swami had the secret of keeping himself ever young in body and spirit. At times when he was ill, one thought he was voluntarily taking upon himself the illness of one of his devotees and working it out in his body.[1]

But the more observant among his devotees could sense even from 1967 that the Swami's health was showing distinct signs of the Swami's unconcern and indifference to his body. He who had conquered even the invincible Time and its forces, started looking as though his mission was over. He who had said once "I am like a piece of sugar candy. If you place it in the open, can you complain that a vast horde of ants has crowded around it to taste of its sweetness?", seems to have said ruefully, in a mood of great pity, "*Kadai Virithom; Kolvarillai.*"[2]

The Swami was now and then alluding to his desire to withdraw. In fact, ten years before his Mahasamadhi, a great sage, Sri Appanna Swami who had come to Tapovanam, asked the Swami jokingly, "which one of us will die first?" The Swami replied in a prophetic voice, "My

[1] A devotee records how once when her child was taken ill at the ashram, the Swami cured the child. While the child was getting well, devotees found the Swami lying in his room with temperature, his eyes red, his body in pain. Such was his compassion.

[2] No English translation of that powerful but brief sentence in Tamil, an utterence of profound compassionate regret, can bring out the linguistic depth of the original. One could humbly render it as: 'We have been keeping a shop, full of priceless materials, but none came to buy.'

body will fall ten years after yours". It is but natural that the devotees standing around, should have taken it as a joke. A number of incidents show that the Swami was disinclined to preserve his body.[1] For example, some seven years before his Mahasamadhi the Swami got a hexagonal pit prepared, with the characteristics of a samadhi, near Sri Venugopalaswami sannidhi. The devotees seeing this were astounded. The Swami gave evasive explanations for building such a pit. By July, 1971, the Swami was subjected to frequent illness. When his disciple, Swami Dasa Giri passed away, the Swami was heard remarking to many that he too was going to 'change the dress' (to cast off the slough, as one would say). In December, 1972, he created the Gnanananda Tapovanam Sri Gnanananda Trust and subsequently transferred lands and buildings of the Ashram to the charitable trust. During the Jayanti Day celebrations in January 1973, the Swami was giving darshan to his devotees right from early hours of the morning in the hall of Tapovanam. When the crowds began to surge towards him in increasing number, the Swami retreated and stood behind his Sila, his vigraha, (the image of the Swami which he got made and installed), for a long time. Coming from behind the Sila, the Swami whispered to some devotees who were near him, that they could have his darshan at the next jayanti celebrations in

[1] One devotee records a conversation he and a few others had with the Swami on an occasion when the latter was ailing. "Swami, if you will it, can't you keep the body healthy?" "These instruments, blunted by wear and tear, the Swami can easily get repaired; but he is not interested." The Swami was evidently alluding to his attainments in Hatayoga by which he had long been preserving his body in all its vigour. A great gnani will give only as much importance to his body as is necessary; nothing more, nothing less. When he felt his mission did not require the body, he let nature take its own course.

his Sila. He gradually reduced the intake of food. He started abstaining himself even from the Pada Pooja, to accustom the devotees to his absence from their midst. Two months before his Mahasamadhi, the Swami told a disciple that his guru had ordained him 'to lay down this body, this perishable clay, before the Chithra Pournima day and be merged in the Infinitude of Pure Consciousness'. He also gave detailed and specific instructions for interring his body in the samadhi pit, dug already.

It was the first of January, 1974. The devotees had gathered in numbers for the darshan of the Swami. He blessed them all, each according to his need and deserts, with infinite tenderness. Like Buddha he was giving darshan till the last. From that day he began to grow very weak. The Swami had begun to retire into himself and could be heard to exclaim "How to go?" and "Should one go?" etc. It was evident he was withdrawing to the deeps within and was not attaching importance to his surroundings. Once, to the distressed devotees standing close by, he uttered words of consolation: "For how long can you see the Swami like this? But, you feel like seeing him for ever, don't you? I shall show you how come along." So saying, he quickly walked to the shrine where his image had been installed. Pointing to it he said: "This is where you will be able to see me always and forever." He then walked back to his room. He was thus indicating in various ways that he was withdrawing.

On Sunday, the 6th of January, the Swami was very much indisposed. It was announced that general darshan would be resumed after two days. Some devotees prostrated before the Swami. Seeing this he remarked: "They are paying obeisance today to a body which is going to be lifeless tomorrow".

The next day, on 7th January, the Swami got up very

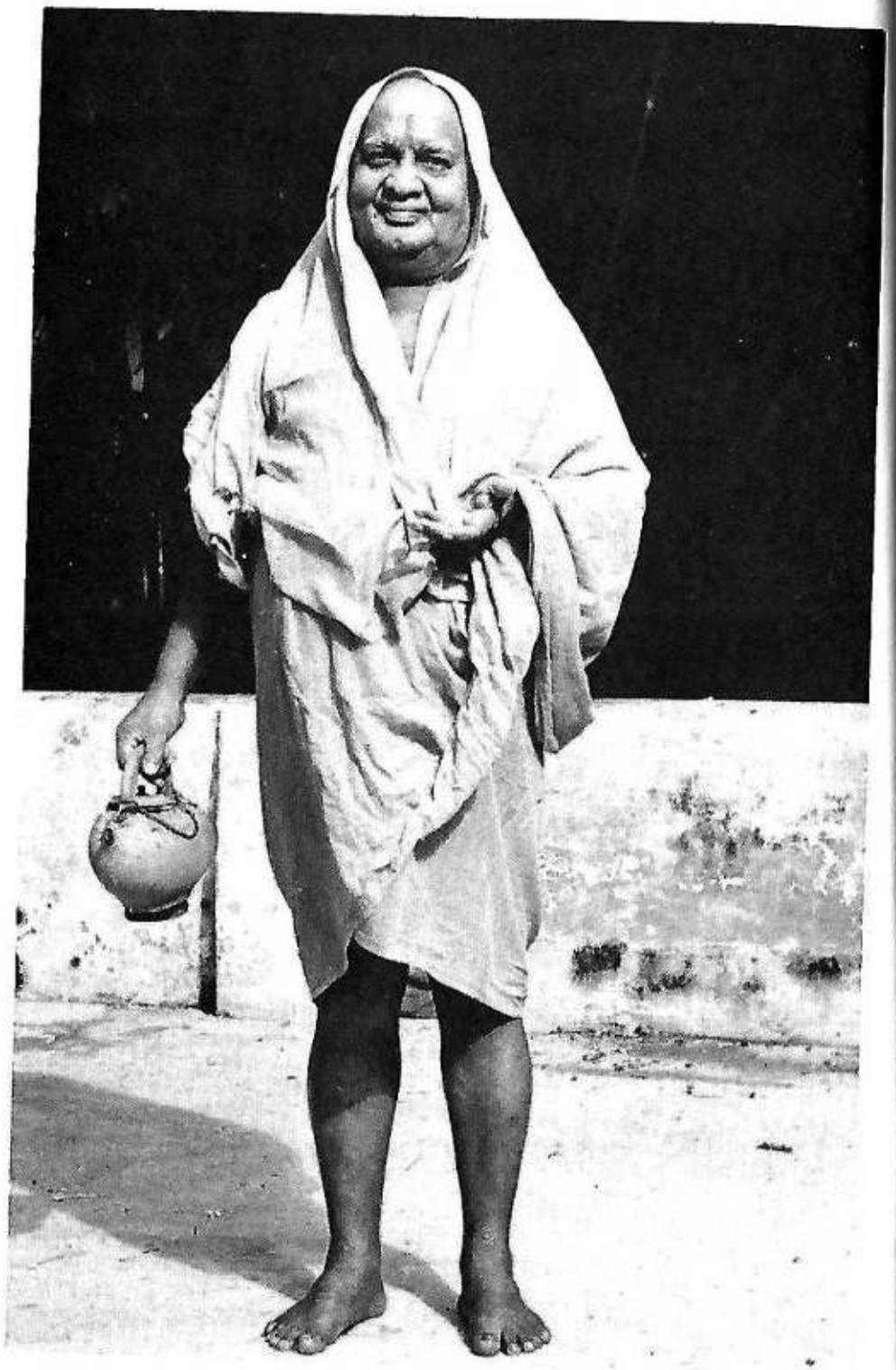
early as usual and was attending to regular work. At about ten minutes to 5 a.m., while he sat down in siddhasana for his bath, the Swami leaned against the wall. Everyone believed that the Swami, being a great yogi, had withdrawn into Nirvikalpa Samadhi[1] and hoped he would regain consciousness later. Doctors were sent for. Medically he was declared lifeless. But there was hardly any sign of decay. The Swami remained in that state for about sixty seven hours — for more than two days and a half. The body was effulgent and radiating all the powers acquired by years of yogic concentration, while thousands of devotees who had gathered were in tears, crestfallen in anguish and sorrow, hoping to 'wake' him up from the samadhi by singing the hymns he liked so much, like the Tatvamasi Panchaka. On Wednesday night, even as the devotees were doing akhanda nama bhajana of 'Om Namo Bhagavathe Gnanananda ya' it was clear that the Swami would not choose to get back to this world of Becoming. After obtaining the advice of spiritual seekers and men of God, the devotees performed all the necessary rituals, singing hymns. On the evening of 10th January, at 4 p.m., the Swami's sacred body was interred in the Samadhi.

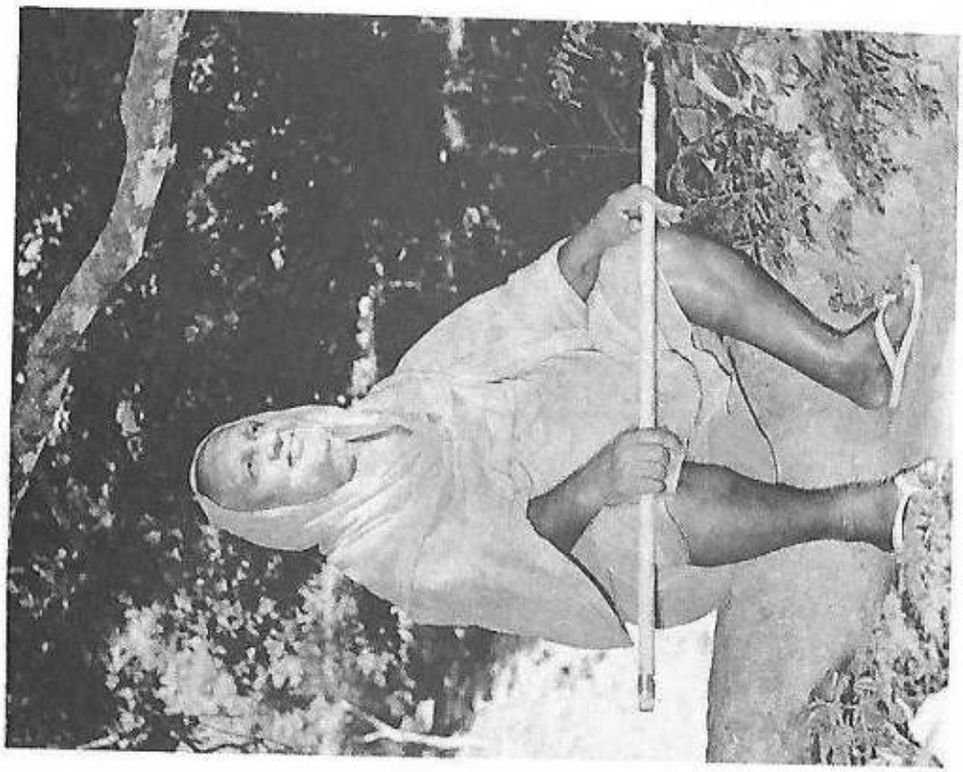
Great gnanis are not born for death. More so, the Swami, a Siddha Purusha. Even while alive, such a person is not limited to the body. "I will be in Jiva Samadhi", he assured his devotees. "I will raise you up, protect you and watch over you."

Did not Shirdi Sai Baba declare: "My tomb will speak, my clay will give you replies. My shrine will bless my devotees and fulfil their needs."[2]

[1] Nirvikalpa Samadhi is total absorption in Brahman and being one with It, bereft of 'I' consciousness and losing all distinctions of knower, knowledge and object of knowledge.

[2] Osborne — 'The Incredible Sai Baba', p. 98.





His devotees say even today that "there was no change in Sai Baba's guidance to devotees, his answering of prayers and his protection in time of trouble".[1] Like him, the Swami also assured his devotees: "Wherever and whenever you think of me, I shall be with you."

The great Advaitin that the Swami was, his sankalpa, will, desire and his sukshma sarira, subtle body, have a force and power that is beyond measure. Have we not heard of the glory of the Jiva Samadhi of Gnanadeva at Alandi which has been a beacon lighting up the path of the weary wayfarer? It is said that Ekanath, the famous Saint of Maharashtra, who lived 300 years after Gnanadeva's Mahasamadhi, suffered once from an acute disease of the throat. Gnanadeva, the author of Gnaneswari, appeared in a dream and told him that a root of the Ajanu tree had encircled Gnanadeva's neck and should be removed. Ekanath, it is said, went to Alandi as directed and was cured of his ailment. Incidentally it may be of interest to note a very close parallel between Ekanath and our Swami. Like the Swami, while he was only twelve, Ekanath was prompted by a voice to meet his guru Janardhan Pant. Thereupon he went as directed to Janardhan Pant at Devgad, even as our Swami went to Sivaratna Giri at Pandharpur. He devoted himself, as did our Swami, entirely to the disinterested personal service of his spiritual teacher.

The Swami laid great stress on the power, the influence and the grace that emanates from the samadhis of great Souls.

While at Siddhalingamadam, the Swami would refer to the Jiva Samadhi of Ragothama Swami, the great Madhwa Saint and say, "He is calling me. I have to go over to the other side of the river". He did establish the Ashram at Tapovanam on the other side of the river, one and a half

[1] Osborne — 'The Incredible Sai Baba', p. 98.

miles from Ragothama Swami's samadhi and considered the place hallowed.

Once, while he was at Kotagiri, he told his host, "The samadhi of a great siddha is underneath, two hundred feet below. Acquire this place; it would be for your good. Swami will come here frequently." And he did.

"In the old days", says the Swami, "Samadhi was attained by Tirumoolar at Chidambaram, by Dhanvantari at Vaitheeswaran Koil, by Patanjali at Rameswaram, by Bogar at Palani, by Kaduveli Siddhar at Tirukanchipuram. Great temples flourish at these samadhis".[1]

The Swami stresses the power of the samadhi as follows: "The tortoise lives in water and when it comes to the bank lays its eggs and goes back to water, it forgets its eggs for several months. Then when it suddenly remembers the eggs, they are hatched. Similarly, those doing sadhana at the samadhis of the yogis who had attained self-realisation, become victorious in their sadhana when the master thinks of them."

The Swami was himself a store-house of tapas and this is reflected in the results that are attained by the prayers at the samadhi.

"Every grain of sand at Tapovanam is pulsating with

[1] A view echoed in the Siddha work 'Nijanandabhodam'. The temple of Ayyappan, the Swami would say, is powerful because of Sabari's Presence. The power behind some of the well-known temples come from the samadhis over which they are built. The tomb at Velanganni as also at Nagore are known in South India for the bounteous blessings showered on the devotees. The veneration of the tomb of Soeur Theresa L'enfant Jesus is largely due to the miracles and graces obtained by her help and 'range from the cure of cancer to the multiplication of bank notes and include restoration of geranium cuttings.' (Evelyn Underhill — 'Essentials of Mysticism'). Witness for instance the miracles attributed to the jiva samadhi of Raghavendra Swami at Mantralaya and the famous yogi Sadasiva Brahmendra at Nerur.

his life and message, and vibrating with his Divine presence'. says a contemporary gnani and tapasvini.

How true is the utterance: "Pranas of famous siddhas do not leave the body!"[1]

There could be no doubt that the Swami's is a Jiva Samadhi,[2] for was he not one of those rare few who could consciously and at will keep out the laws of mortality? We, the ignorant, belong to the world "Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs, and where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin and dies." That is the inevitable end of those who are caught up in the cycle of birth and death. But, with the Swami it is altogether different. We are "Time's fool"; he its master. But when he felt that his gross existence was no more necessary, he chose to withdraw into the subtle. It does not mean that he loved his devotees less. Indeed something very touching happened on 5th January. In the evening he told his personal attendant that his master was calling him — that he could not wait till Chithra pournami; and with his characteristic compassion added, "But so much work is yet to be done and so many need help. How could I have the heart to go?" This reminds us of St. Barnard. Miracles abounded in his life. Worn out by labour and austerities, St. Barnard passed away on the 20th August, 1153 at the age of sixty three. He was abbot for thirtyeight years and left behind a hundred monks at Clairvaux and one hundred and sixty-eight monasteries in Europe and Asia. His last words were: "I know not to which I ought to yield — the love of my children, which urges me to stay here; or the love of God which draws me to Him."

[1] Br. Up. IV.iv.6.

[2] The final step to the highest level of spiritual experience, of being interred while in the blissful super-conscious state. Sadasiva Brahmendra, Raghavendra Swami, Raghothama Swami are some of the great saints who entered Jiva Samadhi.

Chapter II

Swami Gnanananda - His Personality

It would appear presumptuous, surely vain, to think of 'the personality' of one who denied the existence of all personality on the one hand and included and transcended all finite notions on the other.[1] In fact, what provokes astonishment in us is the curious impersonality of the Swami's personality. All attempts to mark the features of the living by which we identify a man, all marks of identification so far detected, all idiosyncracies labelled, would turn out to be woefully inadequate, ridiculously featureless and puny. For, Swami was indeed unfathomable. Look at

[1] For, look at the bewildering answers he gives to various questions: "Was he the one who in the name of Nijananda gave benediction to Achutadasa at Polur?" "Yes." "Wasn't he the sage who was living in a forest near Trichy for 350 years and who cured the illness of a nawab's son and later infuriated him?" "Yes."

Or, think of such apparently fantastic statements made by the Swami himself that he learnt a particular truth from no less a person than Adi Sankara; again that he was with Kabir, Mira or some ancient mystic! How are we to construe them except that while he ridicules our petty notions of time and space, he also points out that a gnani is beyond space and time.

the apparently sarcastic but profoundly true reply the Swami gives to a rather inquisitive, irreverent query: "To which ashram does the Swami belong?" "Swayamprakasa Ashram" (i.e. self made, self-luminous/illuminated).[1] What could be more true of the Swami than this answer? He clearly indicates here that he was beyond all confines. The Swami was a Jivanmukta. Because he was such a liberated soul, there were such infinite and bewildering facets to his person — often mutually incompatible, mystifying, contradictory — but all in one.

Indeed, it is with the faith held in humility that the dumb may speak and the lame may scale the heights of the Himalayas armed by the Grace of the Lord that we make this attempt to write about him.

> "He has made the tenament of flesh his own
> His image in the human measure cast
> That to his divine measure we might rise
> His nature we must put on as he put ours."

Thus describes Sri Aurobindo, the nature and significance of Divine descent into this world. In another context the same Seer explains avatarhood as a result of the infinite grace of the Divine who takes upon himself the human nature with all its outward limitations because the limitation is to be assumed to show that it can be overcome. Swami Gnanananda seems to go even beyond this. Mark the following conversation:

[1] The answer translated literally would mean that 'Swayamprakasa ashram' is the name of the ashram to which the Swami belongs. At the esoteric level it could mean a man of his spiritual stature does not have to hail from any establishment; he is self-made, self-luminous.

A WITTY DEVOTEE: When was Swami born?
THE SWAMI: What! Swami *born?*
DEVOTEE: No. . . . When did he descend into the mortal?
SWAMI: Descend? Swami?
DEVOTEE: .....
SWAMI: Swami was not born; nor did he descend; he appeared.

It is the Lord who out of His infinite mercy that assumes the human form and comes into the world to rescue man from floundering in the miasma of transient pleasures and self-seeking and leads him up to the lofty heights of God-realization which is his priceless heritage. Acharya Sankara, stressing the need for sincere efforts, tells us how we must make use of the opportunities given to us by the Divine:

"*Durlabham Trayam Evaitat. . . .*"[1]

"These three are difficult to obtain; to be born as a man, to have the longing for release and the association with great souls. They are the results of divine grace."

But how to aspire is again something that has to be shown to us by the same Divine who has chosen to put on humanity, involved himself in ignorance and death, which is indeed the greatest sacrifice. Otherwise, it would be well-nigh impossible for the best human being to take up the quest and it is in this light we must learn to see and understand Swami Gnanananda Giri.

We have to contend with the fact that the Swami really did not care to be chronicled/remembered in any book about him and on this account did not choose to disclose anything about his life, which was nothing short of a

[1] Vivekachudamani — verse 3.

miracle by itself[1] — nearly two centuries of intense tapas and self-mastery. The Swami, it would seem, deliberately led one away from discussions about himself or about his experiences. He was content to live in a simple state of anonymity. He would not strut on the stage of life as a spiritual prima donna or draw attention of the populace to his spiritual feats. On the contrary, the Swami was resolutely against any exhibitionism.

The Swami was a Guru *par excellence.* He was a Brahma Rishi in the authentic tradition of India, an intensely human and compassionate soul whose love for the suffering humanity was supreme. To contemplate his face, ever lit up by an unearthly radiance that comes from a life of intense tapas and an awareness of divninty within, is to be transformed unconsciously. His face shone like the sun at high noon. The ananda of a Brahmanishta suffused his being. The sense of stillness, of unalloyed joy, wonder and peace that one felt immediately on entering his presence is beyond the power of words to describe. The penetrating quality of his eyes lit up with tenderness made one feel that one was in the presence of the Divine itself. His eyes were alert, clear and took in everything that happened around him. There was an understanding compassion in his look. In his presence the greatest cleverness was only stupidity and the highest intellectual no better than a child.

The Swami was a little short of average height,[2] rotund at the waist and clad in saffron. There was a certain regality and

[1] To a well-known Tamil journalist who humbly asked about the Swami's early years, the Swami caustically remarks: "Had I known that you would be asking such questions, I would have carriedpencil and paper with me and noted down everything. . . . . Let us leave all idle queries. . . One can measure the height of the tree but not the roots under ground."

[2] Though certainly not four and a half feet, as poet Bharathi describes in his poem 'Kullachamiar'.

grace about him that seemed to suggest that he had walked with kings but this in no way affected his common touch. Not a wrinkle creased his body. He was always of a sunny disposition, cheerful and buoyant in spirit. An ineffable mirth invariably seemed to suffuse his face, and one could not capture in words the radiance of his smile.

Coming in the siddha tradition, he kept his body impeccably agile and fit. He was always pulsating with life. He could stand austerities, tapas of a very high order. Kadirgama Swamigal, a Nepali saint, himself a great tapasvi, who had accompanied the Swami in Burma and Sri Laṇka would say that no one could undergo the austerities that the Swami would practise with unremitting perseverance. His tapas in the Himalayas is said to have attained the utmost reaches of human endurance.

The Swami could go without food for days on end and was totally indifferent to what he ate. While he was doing penance in the Kolli Malai hills, it is said, that he used to eat only jack fruits. During a particular period of penance he used to sustain himself mainly on neem leaves. He could remain in an icy cave with nothing on, reminding one of Tibetan practices. No wonder the Swami's age sat lightly on him. A number of devotees, old and decrepit due to the ravages of time, who had first met the Swami when they were young would recall with wonder that he looked still youthful and so well-preserved even after a lapse of five decades. Even when ill with fever he had been seen taking a bath in cold water and revive miraculously, his face radiating freshness and exuberant vitality as ever.

By his own example he would indicate to devotees that time wasted can never be restored, that the day is not lengthened for any man. The devotees at the ashram could seldom keep pace with his tireless energy, his firm step and the brisk, activity he was always engaged in. There were days when he would get up at 3 a.m., take his bath in cold

water, meet the devotees who were at Tapovanam, talk to them, take part in the pada puja, motor up to Yercaud, a hundred miles away, supervise the work of construction of the ashram there, meet the devotees assembled, return to Tapovanam and keep himself busy till late at night giving darshan to the devotees who wanted to go back to their homes. He would be up again as usual at 3.00 a.m. next day! Such was his stamina and energy.

But what struck one most was his absolute and spontaneous simplicity, his sweet amiability, and his knack of being at home with everyone he talked to, be he saint or sinner. His manner was most ingenuous, natural and free from constraint; any one meeting him for the first time would feel completely at ease.

This simplicity took various forms. But the most endearing and astounding of them was his childlike nature, exuberant zest and the love of merriment. The innocent rollicking laughter, so like that of a child, rippling through his body would rock his whole being. The laughter was so infectious. Such a great gnani could come down to the level of an artless child playing pranks. A devotee records: As a child she was staying with her sister in Siddhalingamadam. While they would be doing some work, suddenly they would be startled by a cock crowing behind them so near. Turning back they would find the Swami standing there mimicking a cock. He would burst out laughing. Till the end, he retained this sheer spontaneous love of fun. Hence the importance given to the children in the ashram.

The Swami's love of children was a constant wonder to behold. He romped with them rolling on the ground in playful zest to kindle their laughter. He would sometimes tease them and laugh boisterously while playing with them.

All great gnanis are childlike in nature and mirror their innocence. They do not have preferences nor carry any rancour in their mind. They live in a state of complete abandon in a spacious firmament of love and freedom. Even as a child completely trusts its mother and leaves all its worries to her, the gnani lives in complete trust of God and fashions his life according to His will. In children, the ego is in a sort of seed form but in the case of a gnani the ego and desire are extinguished. This is the one difference where a gnani is more divine than a child.

> "And Jesus called a little child unto him
> and set him in the midst of them
> And said verily 'I say unto you
> Except ye be converted and become
> as a little child, ye shall not
> enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."
>
> (Matthew 18/2.3)

During the last years when the Swami was slowly withdrawing from the world, he would let children in playful mood, to coax and even command him. He blessed children by talking to them, by fondling them and recounting stories to them. In the mornings, after the pada puja was over he would retire to the big hall in Tapovanam where he would sit alongside the children on the swing. It was verily the vision of beatitude for the devotees — with the Swami in the midst of children, some holding his hands, others nestling closely to him for fear of falling down. As the Swami gently set the swing in motion, the children would gaily look around, pictures of trust and affection. The Swami would place his gracious palm on the children's heads and bless them. The most remarkable thing was the expression in his eyes which were lost in supreme peace and

tenderness, anchored somewhere beyond, brimming with unshed tears of happiness and love. If one had had darshan of the Swami in that posture, repose of peace that passeth understanding, that indeed was the vision of divinity.

This childlike simplicity keeps company to his 'soulabya' or his accessibility. That is what endeared him to those who came to see him. He was accessible to all, prince and pauper alike.[1]

The Swami's way of moving with people, canopied with unbroken gentleness, his way of dealing with devotees, was always fascinating to behold. Abhishiktananda in a very astute comparative study of Bhagawan Ramana and the Swami, brings out the uniqueness of the latter:

"Sri Gnanananda's teaching was similar to the Maharishi's, yet there was a difference in the way of approach and method.

Sri Ramana himself never felt any responsibility with regard to those who came to him. He never considered anyone his disciple in the strict sense of the term, nor did he ever call himself the guru of anyone in particular...

Gnanananda, on the other hand, did not believe in such quietism. Naturally he did not oppose what the outside visitors, those with family and social responsibilities sought in coming to see their guru, in serving him, obtaining his blessing and things of that sort. He even encouraged them and did not worry if there was sometimes a bit of snobbishness thrown in. He considered it quite saitsfactory, considering the spiritual level such people had attained and the practical impossibility of doing more in their present situation. (Evidently the author here cannot keep back his

[1] Compare Arthur Osborne on Bhagawan Ramana. "On more than one occasion he indicated that giving darshan, was so to speak, his task in life and that he must be accessible to all who came." (p. 124)

sense of admiration and reverence.) But if a person was free from external obligations and spoke of consecrating his life to seeking God and the things of the spirit, then Gnanananda was adamant. No one can trifle with wisdom, much less with God."[1]

None can hope to match the incisive sketch of a great gnani and Jivanmukta, who was also a loving master, one who could move about in the Absolute plane of Bliss and this phenomenal world with equal ease and a full sense of participation.

The sick of body and mind, mothers with crippled children, men who were on the verge of despair, all came to him with their problems. His words which were profoundly appropriate invariably soothed those who sought him and not to a few they carried slowly but surely the healing touch to their sufferings. It was not so much the words that soothed, but the grace radiating from his presence. Himself above the touch of mortality, the Swami would never dismiss human suffering or ignore it as a necessary concomitant of the life on this earth. Deeply compassionate by nature, he would treat those on whom the scourge of God had descended, with love and sympathy. Those who sought relief from their physical ordeals would feel the Swami's grace and intercession. Everyone who came to the Swami, was an open book to him. With a single look he would plumb the depth of being of the visitor. His memory for faces was phenomenal as in everything else.

He demonstrated that a guru's love is more than a father's or mother's. There could be something inadequate in other human relationships. But with the guru there can be no distortion. Time and again, the Swami proved this

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 84-85.

by offering his love as a divine ballast to a staggering man who had lost his father, a grief stricken mother whose son fate had wrenched from her, or a husband who had lost his wife. They found in the Swami a real refuge from the tragedies and disappointments of life; a shepherd who would lead his flock in the path of righteousness in the name of the Lord. His goodness and mercy dissolved all their fears and trepidations and put into their hearts a courage they never felt before. An inner conviction dawned on them with their association with the Swami, that he was ever watchful of their spiritual and temporal welfare and nothing would ever be amiss. The Swami showed a keen perception of the devotees' mundane needs, though he himself was completely detached.

The concern that the Swami showed to a suffering devotee had the twin concomitants of human sympathy and a divine detachment. The consummate skill of the Swami in dealing with the niceties of human relationships was a constant source of wonder. He would effortlessly descend to the level of the devotee to the astonishment of all. He would listen to the devotee's tale of woe with rapt attention as though it were the most important thing. He would share the devotee's grief with a warm sympathy.

A devotee who had lost his father sought solace from the Swami. Moved deeply, the Swami partook of his sorrow and told him "What if that father is gone? You would find one in me". The Swami took great and intimate interest in the devotee's family and was a constant source of support to him. The devotee, heartened by the Swami's words of comfort, would gradually develop a sense of release, a lightness of heart and would feel a strange freedom and a profound tranquillity welling up in his heart. The Swami's sympathy, profound in its oneness with others in their striving and suffering was akin to divinity. The compassion

and understanding with which the Swami assuaged the devotees' sufferings were like a balsam to the soul.

And yet he was not in the least attached nor did he get involved in the turmoil. Nothing would rob him of his repose. As a guru he would show concern not only for their temporal welfare but their spiritual welfare as well. It was a unique love that prompted him to give, for example, proper orientation even to souls that had departed and were departing and send them on Godward path. There is a family which is very devoted to the Swami, whose daughters as young children were actually brought up by the Swami as an affectionate mother would. The Swami was very fond of the son and gave him special training in spiritual life even from his boyhood. Unfortunately, the boy was drowned, plunging the parents in irreparable grief. While the Swami shared the grief with the bereaved, he also did something profound. The sister of the boy records a strange event happening in the ashram on the tenth day after the death. While the attendants were dozing off at night, they were startled out of their sleep by a voice wailing "Forgive me, forgive me Swami." It was eerie and spine tingling. Strange rustlings and footsteps were heard, chilling their marrow. They were more startled to hear the Swami's voice answering. They opened their eyes to find the Swami lying serenely with his hand lifted in a gesture of benediction. Two days later, the Swami himself described in detail how the dead boy's soul came with attendant spirits craving for forgiveness and how he assured it of a safe voyage in the beyond. That indeed is a profound instance of divine love.

One of the Swami's dear devotees was a lady well-versed in Vivekachudamani. She used to recite the Gita from memory every day. Her devotion to the Swami was so total and complete that she refused to go to Madras where her husband and children were living and would insist on

being left at Tapovanam. Staying at Tapovanam, attending on the Swami, carrying out his commands in the spirit of consecrated service, was her whole life's joy. Sometimes, when clouds of doubt, pain and sorrow, darkened the light of Truth, she used to ask the Swami, having in mind the verse "Prayanakale manasa chalena"[1]: "Swami, how shall I remember you and God at the time of death when my memory may fail? Has it not been said in the Gita that 'he alone who remembering Me at the time of death, leaves the body and departs, attains My own nature? How do I attain this?"

To be able to remember God at the time of death appears not only very difficult, but also a matter of chance when the body becomes subject to the diseases and miseries of old age, when the organs of sense and action become impaired and do not work properly, when memory fails and when the intellect becomes frail and weak. To expect such a devotee to remember God then is almost to expect the impossible; but nothing is impossible indeed for the Grace of God! If there is His Grace, even the remembering of the name of God at the time of death may not be necessary[2].

When the lady took seriously ill at the ashram and was at the death's door, her relatives came to the Swami and asked him to visit her death bed. The Pada Puja was in full swing at that time and immediately thereafter the Swami,

[1] Gita. Ch. VIII verse 10 which states: "He who, at the time of death, being steady of mind, and being endowed with devotion and power of yoga, would make his prana enter properly into the middle of the two eyebrows, will reach that transcendental and resplendant Purusha, if he meditates on that omniscient Being who is the beginningless (inner controller, the smaller than the smallest (anu), (and yet) supporter of all; whose forms are inconceivable and who is (self-) luminous like the sun, and is beyond darkness."

[2] Please see V.H. Date's Commentary on the Gita.

the thrikalagnani that he was, walked to her bedside. The husband was repeating, as is customary on such occasions, the famous charama sloka of the Gita — "Leave all dharma and surrender unto Me alone; I shall relieve you of all your sins; do not grieve." (XVIII, 66). This verse occurs immediately after the sloka "Fix your mind in Me; be devoted to Me and worship Me, do salutations unto Me; you shall come unto Me; as you are dear to Me, I vow I am telling this to you as (nothing but) truth." (XVIII. 65).[1] The Swami requested the husband to recite in her ear the verses starting with "Prayanakale Manasa Chalena" and offered her tirta (holy water). The husband and daughter were thrilled at this action of the Swami. Even as this verse was being repeated, the lady passed away with the remembrance of the Lord and the guru who guided her till the last moment of her life. Thus was fulfilled the assurance of Lord Krishna.

The Swami's extensive and sublime compassion took a special form of spiritual education towards women. He himself used to say that in no other ashram were women allowed to come so close to the Master as in Tapovanam. It was not mere physical proximity. The Swami believed that women had an important role to play in the spiritual upliftment of society and setting its tenor. He inculcated devotion in them through songs and slokas and stutis like Gita Saara Thalattu, Annapurnashtaka, the songs of Achutadasa and Saint Thayumanavar. When the songs and hymns were sung, the Swami would ask them to pause and explain the meaning to them.

The Swami perceived the divine in women and firmly believed that they were entitled to the practice of sadhana

[1] Translation of V.H. Date.

which results in 'Atma Sakshatkara'[1]. What was important was the rightness, purity and qualification of the individual. A lady could also be a Jivanmuktha. The Swami would cite the instances of the great gnanis of the upanishads, Maithreyi, Gargi and Chudala of Yoga Vasishta.

The Swami's solicitude for the spiritual welfare of the lady devotees was most touching. He was very kind to destitute women and helped them to rehabilitate themselves in life. In a moving account a lady tells us that she was deserted by her husband. As any Hindu wife, she was praying for a reunion. The Swami who knew that her life was marked for something different, gently hinted to her that her prayer would not be granted. He educated her and in due course put her in charge of some of the ashram activities. She found immense peace and harmony in life. He even secured a job for her which gave her financial security, to enable her to lead a serene and useful life at Tapovanam.

Swami could show his concern for women in more curious, unorthodox ways. He would be like a mother to them in their most intimate moments. He would arrange for some rituals connected with girls with utmost care. To pregnant women, he provided a special atmosphere of holiness[2] so that the child in the womb may be properly shaped. We hear that at his insistence even one delivery took place in the ashram and the Swami himself joined the cradle ceremony! The Swami would not stop with that. He would go about even making arrangements for marriages

[1] Compare Yoga Vasishta which says that a woman is not shut out of the temple of wisdom — she has an equal right to self knowledge and if she makes effort can realise the self, even earlier than man!

[2] We are reminded of Prahlada's mother. When she was bearing him she was constantly living in a pure, holy atmosphere hearing divine nama.

of girls in the ashram as a mother would for her children.

The Swami always believed that the family was a homogenous unit, and that the householder should partake the blessings of his darshan with the entire family. His sympathy and love extended to the deer in the ashram compound, the peacock and the monkeys which would coax him to feed them with bananas.

A unique aspect of the Swami's spontaneous affection for all was his abounding hospitality. A devotee might be arriving at the ashram at an unearthly hour. But the Swami would warmly receive him and enquire after his welfare and ensure that he was suitably received and his needs attended to. He would personally supervise the arrangements for food at the ashram and often be present at the meal time to see that devotees were properly fed. When he felt that someone in a group had not been served enough food or properly taken care of, he would hasten to attend to him himself. He was incredibly observant of the devotee's need and would see whether or not he was satisfied. The Swami could not be persuaded to eat until and unless he was sure that everyone else had had his food. The Swami entertained the visitors at the ashram with love and care. Like the gopis of Brindaban, each one felt that he enjoyed most the blessings of the Swami to the exclusion of all others. A devotee might be sleeping in the open exposed to cold winds. The Swami would keenly sense his need and send him a woollen blanket in the middle of the night. This thoughtful act of kindness, the devotee would never forget.

Once Swami Satchidananda, personal assistant of Swami Sivananda, came to Tapovanam. The Swami knew that he did not eat anything but fruits. So he specially arranged for fruits to be brought from the bazaar two miles

away. Some ladies from abroad came to have darshan of the Swami after visiting Rameswaram. It was a hot day. The Swami sensed their need and got apple juice served. They were deeply touched by his gesture. He was the mirror of courtesy.

The Swami was the best example of what a host should be. 'Athithi Sathkara' occupied an important place in the ashram. By precept and practice the Swami reminded his devotees how they ought to treat their guests. Swami Abhishiktananda tells us of his first meeting with the Swami. He and his friend did not hope to get anything to eat at the ashram. So they went out, finished their meal and came back to the ashram. They were totally taken aback when they came to know, much to their regret, that the Swami had waited a long time for them that morning in order to have their company for food.

The Swami's ways as a host were unpredictable. There were occasions when he would ask for food to be prepared for ten or eleven people; but as leaves were being laid for dinner, suddenly out of nowhere fifty or sixty would turn up at the ashram. Nevertheless the food would be sufficient for all. The vessels would literally turn out to be Akshaya patras.[1] On some other occasions the Swami would give directions for food being prepared for fifty people when there were hardly a dozen to be fed. When it was dinner time, the number would swell and the entire food would have been consumed.

The Swami laid great emphasis on 'dana', charity, more particularly 'anna dana' (offer of food). All important functions at the ashram usually concluded with the feeding of the poor. This would remind us of the esoteric signi-

[1] Mahakumbabhisheka Souvenir — 1978, p. 43.

ficance of food which is explained in the 'Taitiriyopanishad' in these words:

> "Whatsoever creatures are contained by the....earth, truly all of them are born from food, kept alive by food and return with it in the end. Food is the first creation. Those who contemplate food as Brahman really obtain all food. Food is a panacea. Food is called 'annam' because creatures both consume it and are consumed by it."

The devotees attached great importance to receiving prasada at his hands and eating the food served by him. The Swami's loving service to them made a tremendous impact on their minds. But the Swami's hospitality was in a sense the washing off of the ego. It was only a process of preparing the devotee for a total surrendering of his will to that of the Master.

Any description of the Swami cannot fail to take note of his treatment of his disciples which were unmistakably that of a siddhapurusha. His actions were mystifying and unpredictable. It is well known that siddhas operate on different planes of consciousness.[1] Most persons operate at the level of their surface consciousness which is gross. What may be considered a pleasing prospect at the surface may not necessarily be always good. The Swami being a siddha and a gnani operated from an absolute plane and therefore reacted differently at different points of time. The Swami never explained why he reacted in a particular way, as this was essentially dictated by the need of the

[1] *e.g.*: Swami giving a lamp to a young mother and asking her to keep it lit under her son's cot; her failure to do it continuously; the loss of the child.

occasion, not as the onlooker saw it, but as it should be.[1] A visitor came and bowed before him, apparently in humility and reverence. The Swami was unaccountably furious with him. The onlookers were amazed at the Swami's inexplicable reaction, of a tender heart turning adamant. The Swami later told them that the visitor was a dissembler and an impostor. The Swami could sense it at once with his penetrating insight and his reaction to it was sudden and utterly shattering. On the other hand, a lady, a foreigner unfamiliar with our custom, who came to see the Swami, could impress him by her steadfast sincerity and ceaseless aspiration.

Before him no man would dare parade his knowledge or affirm his petty worldly authority or mask his hypocrisy. On the other hand, the Swami would guide even the humblest of the devotees, who was earnest of purpose, by probing philosophical discussion on 'who am I' or request him to give a dissertation at some length on "asti, bhati, priyam".[2]

Thus the Swami's expansive and sublime love and affection were characterised not by sentiment but by divine discrimination. He knew what was not only necessary for the devotee but what was 'good' for his spiritual welfare.

No man who is not prepared to wash away the inward defilements and put up with physical discomforts, is fit to

[1] It is interesting to study the following parallel events. Once a child of a close devotee of the Swami developed serious stomach trouble. The Swami, by merely offering it a banana fruit cured it. On the other hand, someone else who thought that the ashram was a kind of a clinic, wanted the Swami to cure him of some ailment. The Swami retorted: "There are plenty of doctors — professionals — treating people. They are keeping idle. You need not come here for that."

[2] Existence or Being, self-luminosity or knowledge, love or Bliss — Sat, Chit, Ananda.

tread the spiritual path, as vairagya is the condition of spiritual advancement. The rooms at the ashram were not well-furnished. There were also no fans in them. But the devotees braved the discomforts and the inconvenience. The Swami's radiant love, and unruffled serenity, produced a restorative quiet and a recuperative repose, which enveloped and transported them beyond the trammels of physical existence, a priceless recompense. A gesture from the Swami, a kind enquiry, a smile would leave them spell bound and dissolve all their discomforts. The Swami used to say that something cannot be had for nothing. Master that which seeks to master you. One has to sacrifice, for behind it waits a winged angel to bear us up to the heights. One has to develop distaste for things of the earth, build the inward mansion of faultless conduct, a house tenanted by all that is good, if one wanted to taste real bliss. The devotees basked in the sunshine of the Swami's grace and filled themselves with his overwhelming mercy. As they left, they took with them the fragrance of his hospitality and love, looking ever towards him with eyes of holy love and a joy filled to the brim their self-emptied heart.

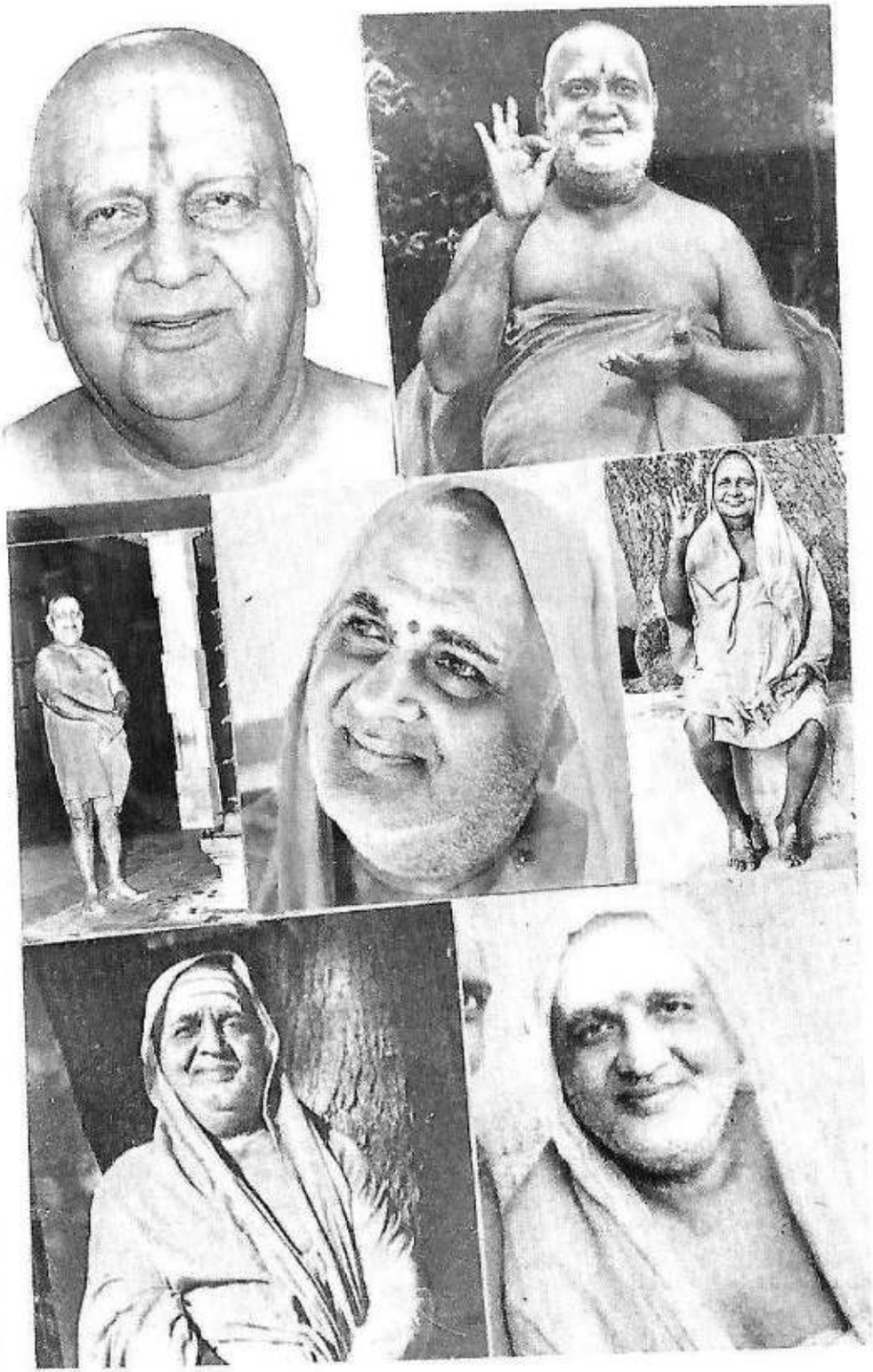
The Swami never bothered about the status of a person. The Swami had very nice ways of deflating people's ego so that the self may be renounced. The Swami looked askance at a person who had announced the arrival of a manager of a renowned tea company and refused to receive the visitor. He had nothing to do with managers. Later on, when his name was mentioned, the Swami softened and said "Oh, he is welcome. Let him stay. I have been thinking about him", and was all consideration for the devotee. The taint of the self clinging to worldly values had to be purged away. He was bound only by the love of the devotee. Once, the Governor of a State who was himself a very pious man, an erudite Sanskrit scholar, came to visit the

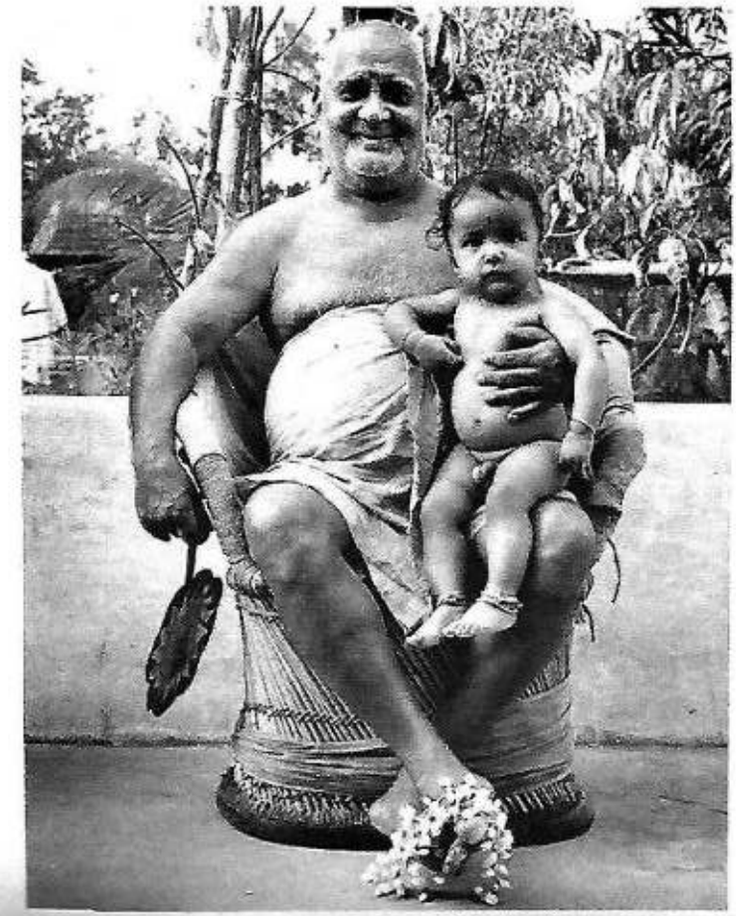
ashram. One of the local authorities who was supervising the protocol became officious and ordered a devotee present there to ask the Swami 'to get ready soon'. The Swami, whose divine authority was above all human authority, did not himself venture out for more than an hour. Though people urged him to take a chair, the Governor, realizing the implication quietly stood in humility and devout supplication that came so naturally to him. When a devotee made a special plea to the Swami, the Governor was admitted to his audience. The Swami responded with exquisite delicacy, dignity and warmth and the Governor was later closetted in the hall in privacy with the Swami for an hour listening to the ambrosial words of the great sannyasin that bathed him in a serene and transquil current of peace and bliss. When the Governor took leave and departed, the Swami characteristically remarked, "There goes a priceless gem."

All this might appear whimsical and lacking in common courtesy to one who was not aware of the marvellous sense of etiquette of the Swami. If a person occupying a high status in the world, say a Deputy Inspector General of Police, came to have darshan, the Swami would accord him all the respect due to his position, however humble he might be as a devotee. This was by way of caution to those around him that the visitor should be treated with respect. If a person who made munificent donations to the ashram, for instance, if the advocate of Tirukoilur who gifted to the Swami the land on which Tapovanam ashram stands today, visited the ashram, eventhough the Swami would like the cloud of ego to be dispersed he would treat him with utmost consideration, as he was most anxious that the devotees should be beholden to their benefactors. He was most considerate and kind to those who could be called the oldest devotees who had started adoring him long before

he became known as the Sage of Tapovanam. The Swami, however, was totally different once the devotee was free from external obligations and spoke of consecrating his life to seeking God and the things of the spirit. Exterminating all those interests, values which nourish selfhood, one had to be cleansed, purified and stripped of the ego. He was then adamant that one should immerse oneself totally in the quest for truth, with the ruthless abandonment of everything in the way, utterly surrendering his own will, person and earthly goods to the cause of the inward quest — humbling himself in the valley of humility and dissolving individuality. The self has to cease to be its own centre and circumference.

There were many occasions when the Swami would start a devotee on the road to introspection. This, he would do by being indifferent to him, by admonishing him in the presence of others. This was designed not only to fathom the devotee's faith but also to deflate his ego and subject him to relentless self-probing. The Swami would impose the discipline on those who were very close to him and who he thought deserved his consideration and spiritual ministrations. The cravings and mental oscillations of the past had to be erased and obstructive old paths and habits made to fade away and die, if the unmortified affections of the heart were to be sublimated to a congruous harmony. The more he chastised a devotee the more likely it was that he was very close to him in spiritual kinsmanship. The more he treated a devotee with a cool indifference or a frigid look, the more likely it was that he was brooding over the welfare of the devotee. Those who knew this process of fiery alchemy and its transmuting effect on them and the Swami's 'mahatmyam' would gladly surrender at the Swami's feet in the firm conviction that whatever happened to them was for their good, that it quickened





their awakened intuitions, that it was the ultimate probation which would earn them the Swami's abiding grace and intercession. They slowly realized he was God and man in one; he was what the infinite Being and Its Power are when manifested behind the veil of human body and feelings.

Our knowledge of the human side of the Swami's personality will be enhanced further when we notice the ritual of leave taking at Tapovanam. Yes, it was a ritual. But it was a poignant occasion for the devotee as the Swami's incomparable grace would melt the devotee's heart. He would feel as though he had been torn away from life and all that shed lustre and gave meaning to it. For, wasn't the Swami the incarnation of love?

It was an unwritten convention of the ashram that a devotee must obtain permission from the Swami before leaving, to protect him on the way.[1] When the devotee took leave, the Swami would impress on him a 'prasada'. The devotee would depart rich in unbounded happiness, with an awakened joyous perception that his life was swallowed up in a larger whole, that a larger consciousness was pressing on the individual consciousness.

But it was not quite easy to obtain permission to leave. When a devotee was most anxious to leave in order to resume his normal avocations, the Swami might detain

[1] A devotee once came away from the ashram by car, without obtaining Swami's permission. As ill luck would have it, he had very little fuel and no petrol was available at Tirukoilur either, an unusual thing. It was an exhausting experience. After agonizing search, he managed to get some petrol and make a move. On his next visit, the Swami, half in jest and half in admonition, exclaimed: "So, the good boy that you were, you thought of leaving without informing me? But I was with you the other day." The devotee was completely nonplussed!

him and ask him instead to stay on. There were occasions when devotees detained against their inclinations had been saved from what might have been an accident or an embarrassing situation. On the other hand, a devotee who had come to the ashram with the intention of staying for a few days might even be asked to leave almost immediately. There was a hidden purpose in everything the Swami did.[1]

An affluent devotee hailing from a village near Villupuram who was a regular visitor at the ashram and who had never missed the darshan of the Swami on Thursdays, a day sacred to the Guru, was asked to leave as soon as he had arrived. This devotee was deeply distressed, even perturbed at his sudden dismissal without a word of explanation or reproof. As the devotee returned home, heartbroken and in tears, to his utter amazement he saw thick menacing clouds engulfing his village. A thunderstorm was about to break and destroy the produce of his recent harvest, left to dry in the sun. He hastily collected his produce and was able to save himself from what might have been a costly disaster. The Swami's intercession was deeply imprinted in the memory of every devotee.

The Swami would look at the devotee with eyes full of tenderness and love and this look alone was enough to win the heart of the devotee. When the devotee made his parting obeisance, the Swami would take special care to

[1] Compare the close similarity at the 'Ashram' of Shirdi Sai Baba: "One test of faith was, devotees were not allowed to leave Shirdi on the date they had planned. It was the practice as with any other guru, to ask permission to leave. But he did not always grant it. If the devotee's leave of absence of duty expired or if he had some other business or appointment, this would be very awkward. None ever suffered by it. Somehow matters turned out so that no harm was done but great faith was needed to believe that before-hand."

('Incredible Saibaba' — Arthur Osborne)

give him a 'prasada'. To some he would give an apple, to others it might be a lemon, to yet others a wide assortment of fruits or vibhuti (holy ash) or kumkum (vermillion). There was a deep understanding of human nature and its responses even in the way he distributed 'prasada'. At the end, the Swami would tell the devotee softly in an endearing tone with an affectionate gentle smile, "Meendum Sandippom" — We will meet again.[1] It was a call to remember him.

Businessmen and others who were care-worn with anxiety at having been detained by the Swami just when they were due to leave for their places of work, came home only to find that nothing had gone amiss. Indeed they noticed instead that their absence turned out to be a divine blessing.[2]

Devotees have recalled with a sense of awe and incredulity the ways in which the Swami had saved them from disasters and accidents, detaining them just when they were anxious to leave. The Swami was a 'thrikalagnani'[3] and with his divine intuition, indeed, saved many from potential disasters. There had been occasions when the Swami had advised devotees to take an apparently longer route while returning home. It transpired later that the road by the shorter route

[1] It may be noted as a significant hint that before his Mahasamadhi, whenever people came from long distances, the Swami detained them for a long time. At the time of leave taking he did not utter the usual parting words "Meendum Sandippom". He might occasionally wish them "Jaya Mangalam, Subha Mangalam" (blessed be thou), a benediction indicating that an era was coming to a close.

[2] A very devout, prominent businessman from Coimbatore was once detained for a long time. He began to entertain serious misgivings about the business because of his prolonged absence. But to his amazement he found that the order book was filled and the business was flourishing even better than what he could have encompassed by his diligence.

[3] A Seer who could apprehend the triple time — time past, time present and time future.

was either submerged by a flood making it impossible for traffic to ply, or a bridge on the road had collapsed.

The Swami would often tell a devotee who was taking leave, "Buy me also a ticket. I will be going with you". In his next visit the Swami would relate all that had happened to the devotee on his way back from the previous visit, as though he had himself journeyed with him. Even rationalists have been known to have surrendered to the Swami in these matters, casting away idle curiosity and doubt, in telling experiences. It is clear that the Swami was only trying to reinforce the devotee's faith.

If Swami could treat the lay with such kindness, love, and regard for their temporal status, how much more distinguished should be his treatment of sannyasins and men on the divine path! The Swami made the ashram a hallowed spot. He would not allow a sannyasin to go to the market place or on an errand which others could accomplish. He considered the sannyasins as God's chosen few, deserving of the highest regard and consideration. He would not tolerate anyone trifling with a sannyasin or slandering the very notion of sannyasa. A muslim once came to the Swami and requested him to give him prasada. It would help cure an illness in the family, he said. The Swami, who could read the most secret thoughts of others, answered: "You may go to the temple priest who will help you." The devotees who had been watching the exchange were a little surprised that the Swami who was always so merciful, should have refused help. Later the Swami declared: "This person thinks I am deceiving people wearing ochre robes. . . .wants to test me. . . Nobody is ill in his family. There are also people like him in this world. May God protect them."

Being a great siddha and a gnani, the Swami could intuitively recognise the greatness of a sannyasin. A number

of them visited Tapovanam. The respect and affection they showed the Swami was indeed the true measure of his greatness as he was the peerless sannyasin himself. There was a certain warmth of affection and felicity between them. The Swami cut across the barriers of different religious pursuasions of the sannyasins and was on equal terms of spiritual intimacy with all of them. The signal instance of the mutual love and regard between the Swami and Abhishiktananda, a French Benedictine monk, is too well-known for elaboration here. Walibaba, a muslim mystic, was a frequent visitor at the ashram. He and the Swami would embrace each other and talk animatedly and the Swami would offer delicacies and fruits to him. Bellary Swamigal came to Tapovanam and used to spend many days with the Swami. Omkara Swami of Thotapalli Hills, an upasaka (worshipper) of the 'soham' mantra, was another visitor. It is said that this compassionate Swami donated a piece of his bone to a girl who was limping. A divine person perceives easily the divine quality in another. Sri Ramachandra Tirtha Swami of Sakatapuram, addressing the devotees gathered at Tapovanam disclosed how our Swami was a great soul. The Swami was very affectionate towards Appanna Swamigal. The latter, it is reported, told the devotees: "The Swami is a very ripe fruit; be very careful and protect him. Whatever you want from the Swami, you obtain it from him now. One cannot be too sure when the ripe fruit would fall." On another octasion Appanna Swamigal told the devotees in wonder and admiration: "I touched the Swami. It was like an electric current!"

A word about Swami's knowledge of men and matters of this world may not be out of place here. His versatality was amazing. To cite simple examples — he could tell the quality of a diamond just from seeing it; he could weigh

in his palm an ornament and give an idea of its exact weight and the purity of its gold; he could assess the value of a piece of land from a devotee's description of it, or suggest valuable alterations in a proposed plan for a house.

To go to more technical levels — his knowledge of horticulture would put to shame a professional. While going up the hill at Yercaud, the Swami once expressed a desire to use 'marudhani' leaves which ladies in India use for pigmenting their palms, finger-tips and nails. The ladies who were accompanying him looked around and told him that there was no such tree in the vicinity. The Swami immediately asked a leaf from a nearby tree to be brought and squeezed the leaf by holding it in his palm. Lo! His fingers and palm turned red. He went on to explain to those present that in the olden days pigments were made from the particular leaf and that the dye was fast. A well-placed government officer of the horticultural division who was in the company was simply amazed at the Swami's breadth of knowledge.

He would converse with the sales executive of a tea company very knowledgeably about sales techniques and the psychology of customers; how a demand could be created even for a poor product by an astute salesman! To one, concerned with finance and its management, he could unravel with an uncanny insight, the managerial aspects of finance.

If a devotee was keenly interested in music, the Swami would talk to him about ragas and kirtanas that would enhance the devotee's skill and attainments. To a person who revelled in poetry, the Swami would talk in poetic terms and reel off verses composed on the spot for the edification of the listener.

It was well-known to his devotees that the Swami had attained a rare mastery of the knowledge of medicinal herbs.

A famous siddha vaidya in Madras used to visit the Swami while he was residing in Siddhalingamadam, to have his doubts cleared and learn from the Swami how the various herbs and minerals ought to be mixed.

The Swami had cured a sannyasin of asthma by treating him with special basmams. Indeed in the early days, when residing at Siddhalingamadam, he effectively hid his astonishing spiritual stature from view and passed for a 'vaidya samiar' — a sannyasin turned physician.

A famous practitioner of siddha vaidya says this of the Swami. "One day when I went to Siddhalingamadam to meet the Swami, I found him ill with a raging fever. I asked him, 'Swami, why don't you cure yourself when you know so much of medicine?' The Swami replied, 'I will sweat this fever out'. When I insisted that he should take some medicine to cure himself, to my utter amazement, he got up from the bed and walked across to the well and drawing water by the bucketful he poured it on himself. This lasted for a few minutes. He came back after his bath, an entirely different man, rejuvenated and active. When I checked his pulse, I was surprised to see that he was perfectly normal."

While on the one hand his pragmatic knowledge was a source of wonder for the common man, his spiritual attainments and his scholarship enthralled pandits and purohits. He would discuss with a priest, the religious rites, enjoined by sastras, for a householder, and explain to him their mystical significance. The vaidikas, brahmins well versed in scriptural agama texts, would be thrilled by the Swami's exposition of the religious theurgical practices of the hoary past.

Thus, his knowledge of men and matters was astonishing in its range and depth. He could comprehend anything with the rare intuition of a true gnani. "A true sage understands

without seeing; accomplishes without doing", says Laotse. Indeed it could be said of the Swami as was said of Sri Nigamantha Mahadesika whom the Swami revered, that he was a 'Sarva Tantra Swatantra'. The Swami was especially skilful in touching the rare truths embedded in temporal knowledge and expounding them in refreshingly new and unaccustomed ways:

That takes us on to the Swami's language which was a unique weapon in his hand. It could be absolutely homely; it would be profoundly esoteric. This would not surprise us in the least if we recall that the Swami is in the genuine siddha tradition which has employed everyday language as a powerful mystical vehicle. His sayings would always have an under-current of a secret meaning different from the surface meaning the lay understood. His words were replete with spiritual wisdom but free from cant; disarmingly simple but subtle to the point of being aphoristic and allegorical. He could cast a spell on the devotee by parables and analogies summoned up from his inexhaustible store of wisdom. The extraordinary power of his words, the felicitous artistry of his talks and his incisive intellect that could go straight to the heart of any problem captivated the audience. His utterances were saturated with popular saws, mystical aphorisms and siddha images. One could see that he had drunk deep, the Tamil poetry of Saiva Nayanmars and Vaishnava Alwars.

He could be highly colloquial; he could be rigidly poetic. His humour was racy and sunny; his irony scathing. Once in Siddhalingamadam, on a particular Chithra Pournami day, they had printed a hymn (stuti) in praise of the Swami written by a devotee, beginning "Swabhava Chinmayanandam" in fairly spacious paper and were distributing it. The Swami, in his talk that day, touched on Guru Bhakti and other allied subjects. In conclusion he referred

to the pamphlet and enumerated its various uses: "These pamphlets will help many to sing and pray; to understand the concepts of vedanta and see Swami as Nirguna Brahman; they are full of deep thoughts." And he added laughing — "Besides, the paper is big enough to be also used for wrapping up things." A lady devotee listening to him was startled to hear this. She rushed to her room because it was she who had used one from the sheaf to wrap up small change!

We have already seen how the Swami revelled in ready repartees. Here is one more instance:

A DEVOTEE: "Why, Swami, why have you kept poor Lord Siva from his consort Parvathi by keeping between them Subramanya and Vinayaka?

SWAMI: Oh, that is nothing but family planning!

A devotee wants to know why the Divine, being one, some should be ignorant, some intelligent, some good, some bad. Pat comes the answer: "There is a 20 watt bulb, there is a 40 watt bulb; and a 60 watt too. But the electricity lighting them all up is one."

The Swami was fond of punning, not frivolously but with deep implication; someone present lit up incense sticks. As the fragrance spread, Swami quipped: "Can this vasana drive away that vasana?"[1]

When a devotee was taking coffee, the Swami asked him "Is there too much of kashaya?" Kashaya in Tamil means decoction, in Sanskrit an obstacle to attainment of samadhi in the shape of latent impurity, dullness or stupidity.

[1] 'Vasana' in Tamil as well as Sanskrit has the twin meaning of fragrance and the latent tendencies of past births.

Repetition cannot diminish the magnificence of the famous remark already quoted:[1] "To which ashram does the Swami belong?" "Swayamprakasa ashram."

The Swami's humour when tinged with irony, could be devastating. On one occasion, in the congregation, there was a man who was already married but who, of late, had turned lascivious. The Swami put a very cryptic question which none around could understand: "Oh! Is something wrong with the sight?" Mark, he did not ask what was wrong with the eyes; for, the organs were all right; they were only being abused. The devotee was sure to have writhed in mortification and got back to the path of virtue.

"Faith", defines the Old Testament, "is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen". The Swami nurtured and reinforced the faith of his devotees now and then by his 'siddhis', his occult powers. For, is not faith the most fundamental and sovereign cure for a sense of futility and doubt?

It was but natural that the Swami should have utter contempt for people performing miracles or siddhis for personal gratification and benefit. A miracle monger came to the Swami, taunted and derided him. The Swami kept silent and unmoved. A little later the miracle monger offered the Swami a lemon by keeping it in his outstretched palm. The Swami took the proffered lemon and while doing so, wiped clean the miracle monger's palm. Alas! the latter's occult power too had vanished in thin air and he felt utterly discomfited. With deep penitence he begged the Swami to restore to him his lost power.

"Great Saints", says Sri Aurobindo, "have performed miracles; greater saints have railed at them and performed".

[1] Vide opening paragraph of the section.

An occurrence is usually characterised as miraculous when it does not conform to the physical laws or the laws of nature. But our understanding of the laws of the universe being imperfect, we tend to believe that miraculous happenings are just impossible and they are only instances of adject credulity. And yet, normally, when a saint performs a miracle it is only to help a suffering soul. A gnani like the Swami, would go even a step further. Being an 'aptakama'[1] what he performed as a supposed miracle was only a fulfilment of the Divine will. The Swami was a 'Satya-Sankalpa'. For a true knower of Brahman, all his desires and thoughts come true. All objects and powers of the external world obey his desires implicitly. The Swami by his mere 'sankalpa' (wish) could alter fate. For instance, a family of devotees came to him and mentioned to him despairingly that the astrologer had said that the daughter in their family who was thirty-seven years old was not likely to marry as the planet Guru had already gone round the Zodiacal signs thrice. The Swami replied reassuringly thus: "These planets can only move between the lines drawn in the horoscope. Beyond these planets there is a supreme power. The anugraha of the Guru is not confined by the lines of the horoscope. The girl will marry." She did get married the following year in Tapovanam itself.

The Swami's knowledge of the Tamil astrological texts was astounding. Devotees have recalled how the Swami would effortlessly interpret the horoscopes and quote from the texts to reinforce his predictions. He however discouraged aspirants from dabbling in astrology. He would say that a sadhaka needed a total and generous self-aban-

[1] 'Aptakama' — One who has renounced all worldly desires and attachments, one who has obtained his desire, who is also Atmakama, loving Brahman, the supreme Self.

donment, a certain serenity and tranquillity in meeting the daily incidents of life. One should not be eager to know what would befall one tomorrow. Obsession with the future results in a life harming heaviness and leads to a total rejection of all that is vital for a sadhaka. Total self-surrender is so essential.

When an aspirant asked him, "Swami, will not 'ananya saranagati' mean negation of self-effort? Will this not diminish one's self-confidence? How could the individual progress in this condition?" Swami said: "An aspirant who has performed ananya saranagati has no further action to perform. An ultimate conviction that everything is divine play will characterise all his thoughts. He will stand rooted in 'abheda nilai', the state (of oneness) where no difference exists, from which he will perceive that the see-er, the seen and the act of cognition are nothing but God. Even as sweetness and the sugar candy cohere and cannot be separated, he would understand within his heart that 'anya' and 'ananya' signify the same thing.

An interesting anecdote of a dumb boy who began to speak all of a sudden in the presence of the Swami is even now recalled by the close devotees. Another instance is of a devotee, some of whose relatives were conspiring to injure him by certain occult practices. Intending to hurt him, they invited him on Saraswati Puja day for dinner at their house. The Swami, who intuitively divined their nefarious designs, asked the devotee to take his food at Tapovanam, but insisted he should keep his dinner engagement. After the devotee had returned after taking his dinner, the Swami asked him to take food for the third time at the ashram. Seeing the hosts with the devotee at the ashram, the Swami cryptically remarked to the devotee in their presence: "People beguile you with affectionate words but within their heart they entertain black thoughts which lead

them to administer poisonous potions to injure those whom they have invited with endearing friendliness. There is an Almighty God above, and if he cannot watch over one who trusts Him, of what use is He?" Having remarked thus, the Swami gave him three spoonful of prasada and asked him to swallow it. He turned to the devotee once again and comforted him and said, "Whoever hurts you, don't hurt them in return. Love even those who harm you".

The Swami cured physical and mental afflictions by his healing grace. It was a common sight to see devotees thronging to the ashram with their near and dear stricken ones beseeking a cure. Unpropped by medicines, he cured grave illness by directing his grace towards them. To some afflicted with pain and worry, he would suggest some 'parihara', ritual to mitigate the malefic effects of some planetary positions. To some others he would suggest performance of Ganapathi Homam as he was fond of invoking the grace of 'Pillayar' — Vinayaka — to help the devotee. This would be intended not only to be a 'parihara' but also to develop the Bhakti of the devotee and transmute it from 'kamya' to 'nishkamya'. Ultimately the Swami's message to the devotee was absolute surrender to the Divine will. One would slowly discern that trials and tribulations are intimations from the Divine and the chastening of one's outlook can only be wrought in the crucible of suffering.

A devotee, an erudite engineer married to an affluent lady, who had inherited a large business interest, came upon a period of serious domestic and financial crisis. The Swami asked him what was the cause of his mental distress. The devotee narrated his tale of woe. He told the devotee, "I know you are care-worn because of your financial problems. Don't you know that the Swami here lends money to his devotees! Please accept this twenty-five rupees — and keep it with you. To the Swami, whether it is twenty-five

rupees or twenty-five thousand rupees or twenty-five lakhs of rupees, it is all the same! When the devotee returned to his native place, he found to his great surprise that a debtor repaid him twenty-five thousand rupees and his financial affairs started improving. He was able to realize even the debts which he had considered bad.

A devotee came to the Swami and told him, "Oh, Swami, you are not performing miracles at all, but look at Swami *X*. He performs miracles and helps his devotees. The Swami beamed at him and replied, "Swami *X* and I have entered into in agreement in this business, which I cannot break. If a person comes to me complaining 'I have this ache or that', I send him to Swami *X* according to the agreement. Similarly, if a person wants to get rid of 'bhava roga' or the 'adi vyadhi', he sends him over to me. I do not interfere with his clients, nor does he with mine!" There is a deep significance underlying this statement of the Swami. Though he was constantly watching over the temporal welfare of the devotees and guiding them through every vicissitude of life by granting them what they wanted, yet his ultimate purpose was to create in them an urge to begin to want what he himself wanted to give them, the priceless possession of spiritual discernment which would deliver them from bondage.

A devotee used to visit Tapovanam in what one might call his novitiate days. He used to talk ill of the Swami. Nevertheless, he did not cease coming to the ashram. The Swami drew him to Tapovanam like a magnet. This went on for some years. One day the other devotees noticed a change in this person, as he no longer reviled the Swami, and asked him why. This devotee did not know how and when the transformation, which they had noticed, took place. He could only say, "I do not know when I stopped reviling him, but the greatest thing that ever happened to

me was the chance that brought me to the Swami. Indeed it was not a chance, but something preordained."

The Swami could, with his matchless intuition, sense the latent capabilities and talents of his devotees. A famous disciple of his is the son of a great minstrel who was renowned for his devotional songs which he could render ecstatically. Swami spotted the latent talents in the son. Very soon, he developed an uncanny ability to compose and sing musical pieces of great merit. He acquired mastery over several languages and developed a keen memory and is now renowned for his beautiful musical 'pravachanams'.

A Telugu devotee, who did not know Tamil, began to compose songs in Tamil with the grace of the Swami. The Swami appreciated their merit and added to them a few stanzas himself and asked some of these songs to be included in the daily prayer. This devotee began to compose songs in Sanskrit in due course, a language which he did not also know.

A close devotee of the Swami has recorded how the Swami miraculously cured him of tuberculosis from which he was suffering seriously. The Swami would be very strict with him. Although he was bed-ridden, the Swami would ask him to have an early morning bath in cold water and go round the temple when he could hardly walk a few steps. The relatives were very much concerned about his health. Soon, to please them, the Swami sent him with due escort to the Vellore hospital as per the suggestion of the doctors at Madras. He gave him 'prasada' and just fifty rupees for treatment (hardly sufficient for an advanced case of T.B. treatment). After finishing on the first day, all the clinical tests in the hospital, the patient who was accommodated in a hotel prior to admission as inpatient, had a dream in which the Swami appeared and assured him that he was always with him. Almost instantaneously, he started sweat-

ing profusely and feeling better. By day light he had recovered his energy and stamina. The next day, the doctor was himself surprised at the progress the patient had made. The devotee was discharged the same day, the expenses having come to Rs. 47.10. He returned to Tapovanam and was soon asked by the Swami to join duty at Madras. The doctor at Madras, who again took an X-ray, could not believe his eyes when he found that the patient was completely cured. To this day the devotee is enjoying robust health. "Thy faith has made thee whole". (Mark 5–35).

The Swami being a siddha and a yogi, could do astral voyages. He would be present in various places when actually he was all the time at Tapovanam. His presence was not limited to his physical existence. Many such events have been recorded by devotees. The Swami could read the mind of a devotee. He could direct his thought in a timeless continuum and read in the face of a devotee, hispast, present and future. He could see events unfolding elsewhere.[1]

A staunch devotee of the Swami has this to say: "I learnt that the Swami was at Kotagiri and so decided to go there to see him. I took with me some special sweets to be offered to the Swami. I was delayed at home and on the way, and by the time I arrived at Kotagiri the Swami had left the place. I was very disappointed at not meeting him and offered the sweets I had brought, to the Swami's portrait at the Bhajan Hall there. When I next went to Tapovanam, the Swami came up to me and offered me

[1] A lady who was brought up by the Swami as a child, and later got married by his blessings, had a son who was consecrated by the Swami. She was living with her husband in a far off place. Her son was taken ill and started deteriorating. The Swami, one day, lying in his bed in Tapovanam, suddenly said, to the amazement of attendants, that the lady's son was dead. He must have visualised through his inner sight the child dying.

sweets and said 'I ate the sweets you offered me at Kotagiri. They were so delicious'. I was simply dumbfounded."

Another devotee of the Swami came to Tapovanam to inform him of his mother's passing at Madras. The Swami replied, "I know, I was there". Anyone who has any real aspiration can get in touch with him even today. But one must have faith. Much knowledge of things divine escapes us through want of faith. Faith makes for total surrender.

There have been occasions when devotees arriving at Tapovanam to have a darshan of the Swami would be accosted at the gate by the latter, only to be told what had happened to them on the way and the problems and doubts plaguing their mind. The mere splendour of his presence would wash the devotees' worries away.

Perhaps the greatest miracle that the Swami wrought was the transformation of consciousness in the people who came to him. And that was most unobtrusive. The Swami cast a magnetic effect on all who came into his orbit. He drew them to his fold by his grace and awakened in them an intense desire for the life of the spirit.[1]

[1] Tulasidas, the poet, was wandering deep in thought, by the Ganges, in that lonely spot where they burn their dead. He found a woman sitting at the feet of the corpse of her dead husband, gaily dressed as for a wedding. She rose as she saw him, bowed to him and said, "Permit me Master, with your blessing, to follow my husband to heaven". "Why such hurry, my daughter?" asked Tulasidas. "Is not this earth His who made heaven?" "For heaven I do not long", said the woman, "I want my husband". Tulasidas smiled and said to her, "Go back to your home my child. Before the month is over you will find your husband". The woman went back with glad hope. Tulasidas came to her everyday and gave her lofty thoughts to think of till her heart was filled to the brim with divine love. When the month was scarcely over her neighbours came to her asking, "Woman, have you found your husband?" The widow smiled and said, "I have". Eagerly they asked, "Where is he?" "In my heart is my lord, one with me", said the woman.

Sure, not all came to quench their spiritual thirst. Some came only to be dazzled by the miracles that the Swami wrought; some came to find remedies for their physical afflictions; some came for succour; and some came out of curiosity. But all were transformed in the end. Divine love draws those whom it seizes, beyond themselves. All were converted to love God and seek His grace through the intercession of the Guru in the Swami. They wanted him completely to themselves. The Swami's love for his devotees "was complete for each one and the same for all. This joy of feeling oneself loved by him resulted in a high degree of detachment, for who does not dream of being loved apart from others and with a preferential love? Yet at the same time each man felt as if he were enmeshed in a plenitude of love. One felt with Gnanananda all distinction, bheda had been overcome and had vanished. It was the true personality, the Self alone, the atman, in each person which was immediately perceived by him".[1]

"O Lord, I a beggar, ask of Thee more than a thousand kings may ask of Thee. Each one has something he needs to ask of Thee" "I have come to ask Thee to give Thyself." says Ansari of Herat.

He could turn atheists and rationalists towards faith in the Infinite. He could effortlessly transmute the recalcitrant egoistic self-assertion into a humble surrender to the Divine will. It is indeed true with him that those who came to scoff remained to pray. The Swami, with his matchless intuition could sense the latent capacities and talents of his devotees and make them flower forth, to the astonishment of all. And that would be as natural and organic as a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, a flower into a fruit. But what is more wondrous is that he could make a 'rain-

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 107–108.

bow out of granite'. That is why faith is called the substance of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen; and therefore it is hailed as the greatest miracle. The following anecdote narrated by the Swami himself will bear eloquent testimony to this phenomenon. While he was at Siddhalingamadam, it seems, there would be young urchins coming to see him. They would wrap up sand in a little sheet of paper and leave it near his chair. Some would bring sugar. The Swami would empty the tiny packets of sand and sugar meticulously in separate tin containers. One day the Swami asked them to bring water from the well. He took the receptacle which contained sand and emptied it into the water. Lo! the sand dissolved and what is more, the water was sweet! Such is the power of his transformation of even inanimate objects![1]

He was indeed the Eternal Sakshi or the Witness, the indwelling spirit that pervades the universe from which nothing can be withheld or hidden. He took upon himself the joys and sorrows of the people who came to him. But he never became them. A woman, conscious of her sins, came to him and whimpered, overwhelmed by his compassion, "Swami, in the world outside, people drive us away with scorn. Not only do you allow us to remain, but accept service from our corrupt hands". The Swami answered: "Yes, yes, river water, drain water, sewage water, everything goes and empties itself into the ocean. But the ocean does not become sewage or drain." All impurities are washed away in his presence.

His love was different from our love. It was pure, untainted, disinterested and sublime. Those who have been fortunate to experience this supreme love of the Swami would truly proclaim that it was a God-like love pouring

[1] Compare the experience of Ramalinga Swami — of water turning to oil.

on one like a healing balm of serene peace in a troubled world. The impress of his grace sank deep in one's memory and abided while others faded away.

The Swami would melt in love for the suffering humanity and do everything in his power to mitigate pain, assuage grief, comfort the afflicted and wipe away the tears, wherever he found them. The Swami would not ignore human suffering as merely a part of the illusory universe, but treat it with creative love which is the true attribute of life eternal.

If one were to ask how it was possible for one to contain in himself so much that was incompatible and yet to hold all beautifully resolved therein, the clue may perhaps be found in the fact that the Swami was a 'Jivanmukta'[1] as described in the Yoga Vasishta, a 'stitapragna' or 'gunatita' of the Bhagavad Gita, an 'ativarnasrami' of the Suta Samhita. In fact it is the true lakshana of a Jivanmukta that he dwells in the world in joyous, serene tranquillity without any cravings or desires. Feeling every moment the living presence of God, pleasures do not delight him; nor pain distress him. He is beyond likes and dislikes, heat and cold, love and hatred, pleasant and unpleasant; although engaged in wordly actions for the sake of the devotees, he is untainted and unconcerned; trapped by no attachment he is restfully busy and his peace is reflected in his activities; authentic, he is simple and unpretentious; free from the restrictions of the stage of life, customs, caste, creed and scriptures, he comes out of the net of the world as a lion from a cage, firm and calm like a mountain. Cheerfulness adorns his face; he is the first to laugh and make others laugh; he is full of mercy and magnanimity; is free from cant and dogmatism; he has given up all ideas

[1] 'Jivanmukta' — a liberated man as described in Yoga Vasishta the traces of whose influence can be found in the Swami's teachings. —vide Part III.

of desirable and undesirable; annihilating the mind as effectively as the falling snow destroys a lotus, rooting out the vasanas as a gust of wind destroys an autumnal cloud; is beyond I and mine; a vehicle of universal spirit, he is filled with loving kindness, friendliness to all humanity; whatever the circumstances, he is even minded and the lustre on his face never rises or sets; content with himself and with the things that the Lord in His providence provides, his life is complete and beautiful in itself. Sustained and upheld by his profound understanding of the mysterious purposes of the Almighty, he does everything with a deep humility remembering the Lord in everyone of his acts. He carries on uncontaminated by pleasure, unharmed by any pain, untouched by any insult, feeling no wrong nor wronging others. He always lives in the eternal and ever verdant present, unconcerned with the past. He has abundance of time for everything.

He is one who has realized the Absolute and has freed himself of all bonds of karma. He is in the state of 'sarvatmabhava' of unity with all existence and therefore steeped in unexcelled bliss. It is this 'sarvatmabhava' this oneness with everything in the full consciousness that all men are his kin not only in blood, but still more by being in the same Intelligence and the same Divinity, this awareness of the substratum that informs all, this all-seeing Brahman or God in all beings that distinguishes the gnani and sets him apart from his brethren.

All these qualities of a Jivanmukta were fully mirrored in the person of Swami Gnanananda. The Swami's life was fashioned entirely after God's will. The Swami was perfectly humble as only a God-realised soul could be.

Indeed there is no other way of describing the personality of the Swami than by calling Him a Paramananda Vigraham'.

The Swami was a 'Mahatyagi' or the great renouncer.

Swami defines renunciation as the deliverance from sorrow.[1] The real renunciation in fact is the renunciation of the mind which is at the root of all things.

The Swami was a 'Mahakarta', the transcendental actor, whose mind is free from activity though he might be engaged in action.[2] The Swami was poised in perpetual samadhi or 'Sahaja Samadhi', i.e. constant awareness of the Self. His was an abiding realization of the 'oneness' which is the basis of Universal love. The Swami used to describe this in his oft-repeated quotations:

Yoga Rato Va Bhogarto Va Sangarato Va Sanga Vihinah
Yasya Brahmani Ramate Chittam Nandati Nandati
Nandatyeva.

(Bhaja Govindam)

"One may take delight in yoga or bhoga, enjoyment, may have attachment or non-attachment. But only he whose mind steadily delights in Brahman enjoys bliss, none else."

Etthozhil Seidalum Edavasthai Pattalum
Mutthar Manamirukkum Monatthe

(Thayumanavar)

"Whatever activity one is engaged in, whatever misery one is subjected to, the mind of a Jivanmukta abides in the Eternal Silence."

[1] All the references are to the Swami's sayings in 'Gnana Inba Veli'.

[2] A buddhist parable illustrates this: Two young monks while on a journey, had to cross a swelling river. There was a young woman who was unable to wade through to the other bank. One of the monks lifted her on his shoulders and crossed the stream and dropped her on the other bank. The two monks resumed walking. The self-righteous of the two railed at the monk who had helped the woman. After listening to him for sometime, the latter quickly replied: "I have dropped her off long ago. It is you who are carrying her still."

Whether he engaged himself in any action or gave it up, he was unaffected and indifferent and was uniformly calm in his heart in either case.[1]

The Swami was a 'Mahabhokta', the great enjoyer. A Mahabhokta does not desire the pleasure he has, nor does he discard enjoyment from the pleasure he has. He enjoys what he has because he delights in the Self. He is therefore a 'Nityathripta', the eternally satisfied. The Swami himself says: "Swamikku viruppum illai; veruppum illai" — neither has he likes; nor dislikes. One can do nothing better than to quote the Swami's own words on the characteristics of a jivanmukta; "Equality, annihiliation of the mind, freedom from anger, freedom from desire, triumph over senses, universal love, charity, freedom from miserliness, freedom from fear, from ego — it is these qualities that mark Jivanmuktas."[2] "He was God and man in one, he was what the infinite being of God and His power manifested behind the veil of a human body and human feelings are."

No sketch can hope to resurrect the image of the Swami for us in all its fascinating multiple facets. In this he was like an iceberg. What is seen of him on the surface is not half so mammoth as what is concealed. Indeed he is of a towering stature, like Trivikrama, shrunk not by words of praise or blame, verily a colossus.

"It is in His saints above all that the Lord shows His wonders."

It is with profound gratitude, we realize that such a one was moving amongst us as though he were one of us.

[1] When a devotee apologised to the Swami for his intrusion when the Swami was in pain with ulcers, the Swami told him, "Don't bother about it. Do not be worried by illness. It is all mere play acting".

[2] G.I.V. p. 77.

The Sila Vigraha

THE Swami's life size sila vigraha which is installed at Tapovanam was two years in the making and was arranged to be sculpted in Bangalore by a devotee. It is carved out of a single monolithic black stone and was etched using some of his photographs.

When it was brought to Tapovanam — and it was the Swami's wish that it should be installed there — the image was placed in a niche in the northern wall of the Bhajana Hall on the Chithra Pournami day in 1959.

The devotees coming to the ashram would make their pranams to the idol and place their offerings before it in prayerful worship.

The Swami had a brick wall built in front of the vigraha concealing it from view for quite some time. Subsequently he had built a small mandapam with four pillars and the sila was installed there on 'Thai Krithika'. A garbhagriha and later a manimandapa were also built. Over a period of time the idol has acquired a serene dignity and loveliness. Devotees do not fail to note how angularities have disappeared and the features have acquired nobility and grace.

On all important occasions the Swami would sit in the manimandapa, a little ahead of the idol to enable the throng of devotees to perform the paduka puja, thus surcharging the atmosphere with a still and intense spiritual feeling.

The Archa is in a sitting posture, the right palm lifted denoting the chinmudra and the left palm holding the 'Sri Kosams'. South-facing, it is the embodiment of Dakshinamurthi and a perfect interpretation of the teaching by silence, profoundly potent in its meaning. There is thus

here a perfection of significance in the perfection of the form.

It bears a likeness to him — youthful, refined, calm. There is also reflected a gravity of deportment. The restfully serene face, the benign expression seems to beckon devotees to kneel and pray. Distinguished expressive eyes with an imperturbable gaze, look at the devotee and he stands rooted, mesmerized by the luminous eyes that speak of a rare calm and an unshakable firmness, plunging him into the depths within.

The image seeks to mirror his ethereal beauty, his sparkling countenance and reflect in full measure his merciful look, his composure, ingenuous mirth, universal love and child-like innocence.

The Swami had consecrated the sila by his touch, investing It with his spiritual power. It is an asylum of clemency. It conveys its power to save.

Devotees get an impression looking at the vigraha that it is the Swami himself who is seated in readiness to shower his grace and love on the devotees. To them a vision of majesty as also of mystery radiates from Its presence.

Devotees who look at It feel an invisible strength coursing through them and a harmony which spells peace, supreme confidence and inner silence; a calmness that suggests the stilling of mental agitations, nudging them to deep contemplation.

To the ardent devotee, It is the gateway to the blessed Essence of things; Its presence bespeaks of an inexhaustible joy, life-giving courage and plenitude.

Undoubtedly it was the Swami's God-like concern and compassion for suffering humanity that must have prompted him to agree to his idol being consecrated for worship at the ashram; he must have intuitively divined the anguish of his devotees when they would no longer see him in his

physical form. He must have thought that his image might somewhat assuage their grief.

It is said in *Guruparampara Prabhavam* that when Sri Ramanuja was about to leave Thirunarayanapuram (Melkote) for Kanchi, the people of that place refused to allow him to leave. They told him that they would not be parted from him. Sri Ramanuja, in his infinite mercy and overflowing compassion for his devotees, asked for a *sila vigraham* to be made in his likeness and invested it with his Divya Shakti. He then gave the vigraham to the people and told them that they might offer worship to it. The people were mollified by this gesture of the great Acharya and allowed him to leave for Kanchi.

Guruparampara Prabhavam also has it that Sri Nigamantha Maha Desika, taking up the gauntlet thrown by a sculptor, cast his own image in bronze to the utter amazement of everyone. Sri Desika then asked the sculptor to cast a Peetam for the vigraham. As the vigraham was being fitted into it, the sculptor apparently thinking that the cheeks needed some little shaping, began to chisel them. Lo! Blood began to flow where the chisel had fallen. The sculptor was utterly discomfited by his ignorance of the '*Silpa sastra*' and fell at the feet of the great Acharya and prayed for his forgiveness.

The sastras declare that God the unmanifest, manifests Himself in the Archa form to bless His devotees. By worshipping the divine in the Archa form, the devotees are enabled by stages to transcend the form and intuit the reality symbolised by it. The sastras also declare that in the Archa form the qualities of gnana, shakti, bala, aisvarya, veerya and tejas are particularly effulgent.

It is only in this form that God's limitless *soulabya*, accessibility, stands revealed. God willingly becomes a prisoner of His devotees who throng to Him, and submits

Himself to their devotion and prayers. The Archa form properly consecrated becomes the tabernacle of God, who enters His abode in the 'Suddha Sattva' form and becomes one with it, even as milk mixed in water. It is our ancestors' conviction that it is this form that is 'Subhashrayam'. This underscores the truth that it is this form of God that casts off all sins of the devotees and offers an easy form for meditation.

It is the firm belief of the devotees that the Swami has consecrated and invested his vigraha with all his matchless qualities and spiritual power so that his devotees could continue to offer worship to his *sila vigraha* (which is none other than the Swami himself), when the Swami cast away the physical body. They perceive that It radiates from Its presence a deep and profound peace and all their prayers and calls for succour are answered when they worship It in all humility.

Marriages are solemnized in the presence of the *sila vigraham* of the Swami. Devotees adorn the Swami's idol with the sarees and ornaments bought for marriages and seek his blessings. Ritual worship of the vigraha is now part of the daily activities of Tapovanam.

While the idol is itself the symbol of the Swami as Dakshinamurti, the Mahalinga "is the symbol of God's coming into His creation and equally the symbol of the creatures passing, his departure into God..... The Shivalinga stands between form and non-form, rupa and arupa, between manifestation and what can never be manifested."[1]

The Swami had expressed a desire that the deepastamba — a column of lights — which stood in front of the idol should be moved ahead a little further to a point from which

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 63.

one can pay obeisance to both the idol and the Mahalinga at the samadhi.

The column of lights is the symbol of the Knowable, the self-luminous Brahman which is the inmost Self of everything, the Light even of lights, eulogised in the Gita as 'Jyotishamapi Ṭajjyotih'. By Its light, Its radiance, everything is lighted, illumined.

The Swami is wholly present in these signs "which are utterly 'beyond', yet at the same time and for that very reason most intimately within, the absolute of both transcendence and immanence".[1]

His transcendence is the very source of immanence; "transcendence and immanence being no more than two of man's words by which he tries to indicate simultaneously the beyondness and the withinness of the supreme mystery, both the rupa and the arupa of Being."[2]

The Teaching is condensed in the image of the Teacher. "The image is like a drop of the nectar of immortality fallen into the world of forms or like the sound of that celestial music that could charm a rose tree into flowering amid snow." — a true symbol of the Swami.

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 63.
[2] ,, ,, p. 65.

Chapter III

Swami Gnanananda - His Teachings

Introduction

"He refused all cheap spirituality. His teaching was fundamentally the way of total renunciation so that finally there is no ego left to manifest itself. . . . His communication with his disciples is never through the intermediary of things. It is direct, in depth at the source of his being. It is true that nothing is felt except a peace which reveals and illumines and which transforms the one who can receive it."[1]

"He has come mainly not as a prophet to deliver a new message, but to affirm the truth and vitality of our religion in all its fundamentals and ramifications. Those who pro-

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 15–16. Compare also 'Ramana Maharishi' by Arthur Osborne, p. 52: "I cannot turn my gaze away from him. . . . I become aware of a silent, resistless change which is taking place within my mind. . . . I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me, that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest."

mise a new way cannot have, in fact, anything new to offer. Swamiji drives home this and similar truths through remarkably apt allegories and pithy sayings."[1]

So we go on piling up quotations — summaries, epitomes, eulogies of Swami Gnanananda's message. But we would not have exhausted the theme. To attempt to give a detailed exposition of his teachings, classifying them under various headings, is to make abstract what is concrete; and to reduce to the dimensions of the logical intellect what the Upanishads have described as something indescribable, something beyond the power of the intellect and its logic.

"Yato vaco nivartante aprapya manasasaha"[2]

And yet we may attempt to perceive the underlying concepts by reflection and contemplation through which we are enabled to penetrate into the inner mystery. It is true that the Swami himself says:[3] "There is a person who has taken contract for these fruits and he sells them on the road nearby. Another person purchases fruits from him and begins selling on the opposite side of the road. When purchasers come, the latter invites them by saying "You buy from me; for the fruits here are of a superior variety" although, in fact, all fruits come from the same source." However, the point of significance is not how new is the Swami's message but how complete and how pristine.

The yoga that the Swami preached was truly 'adhyatma

[1] 'Sri Gnanananda or Grace Abounding' — K. N. Subramaniam, p. 9.

[2] The translation goes thus: 'From It all words fall back failing to reach It, along with the intellect.' — Taittiriya Upanishad. II.9.

[3] 'Sri Gnanananda or Grace Abounding' — p. 9.

yoga'[1] which Katha Upanishad describes as the realization of the Self beyond all dualities, as the Brahman which has no attributes. This self-awareness is reached through relentless, uncompromising self-enquiry in the light of scriptural teachings. Traditional philosophy points to the trimarga, the three paths for self-realisation, as karma, bhakti and gnana yoga. The Swami gave a novel interpretation[2] to these much-used, even much abused terms by relating them to 'sthula, sukshma, karana' yogas, making the whole approach flexible and comprehensive. In this the Swami had in mind the three fold division of the human personality which consists of the sthula sarira — the gross physical body, the sukshma sarira — the subtle body and the karana sarira — the causal body. When these three are absorbed and get ultimately merged in the witness consciousness, when the separate identity of the jiva is lost, a state of universal mental mode and awareness is reached, which is the state of the true Self.[3] "Gnana, bhakti and karma are only paths and as such they must necessarily lead us to something beyond. He who mistakes the path for the goal will never reach the end of the journey. . . . Gnana, bhakti and karma are proving to be satisfactory paths only if, on the level of thought, devotion and action,

[1] 'adhyatma yoga': Yoga concerning Self. "The wise one having realized this Atman through the adhyatma yoga overcomes both elation and grief." (Ka. Up. 1.2.12)

Adi Sankara explains Adhyatma Yoga to be "concentration of the mind which has been withdrawn from the sense-objects". The description of the yoga itself is at Ka.Up. 1.3.13 and is explained by Sankara in Sutra Bashya 1.4.1.

G.I.V. p. 44 sums up the essence of Katha Upanishad.

[2] G.I.V. 'The Goal of Life' — p. 194–195.

[3] The Swami links these three with his concepts of parabhakti, para-yoga and paragnana, the ultimate reaches in the three fold path (G.I.V. p. 193–195), when the doership is dissolved in the One.

they already reflect the dawn of light from the depths of the person's being. Their inspiration is always far beyond them; they are as it were signs and the nature of every sign is to lead one to what is beyond."[1]

It is this clear distinction between the path and the goal that made the Swami speak of Bhakti leading to 'para Bhakti'; karma leading to 'para yoga'; gnana leading to 'para gnana'. When bhakti is merely a path to take us to the divine, it is bhakti yoga. But the more the movement is taken up by the light and love of God, the more it gets purified and becomes 'para bhakti'. So, with the others. 'Para gnana' is (for instance) attained when there is the 'supreme' realization of the Atman as the 'ananda ghana swarupa' — as compacted of bliss.[2]

The Swami quotes Bhagavan Ramana, whose message comes closest to the Swami's own:[3] "Absorption into the source or core of existence (or the heart) is what the paths of karma, bhakti and gnana teach."[4]

He who merges the self in the Self truly knows.

The Swami, by his teachings and way of life, indicates the path for the realization of the Truth pointed out in the Mahavakya, principal aphorism, of the Mandukya Upanishad so dear to the anchorites of the Jyotir Mutt; 'Ayamatma Brahma' — This Self is Brahman.

Ashram

According to tradition it is believed that the Swami belongs to the Jyotir Mutt, an institution founded by Sri Sankara Bhagavadpada. Sri Totakacharya, the disciple of

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 13–14.

[2] For a fuller treatment of the subject see 'Goal of Life' (Part II).

[3] G.I.V., p. 197.

[4] 'Upadesa Saram' of Ramana Maharishi, with English translation and notes by B. V. Narasimhaswami, p. 38.

Sri Sankara was the first Pontiff of Jyotir Mutt. It was with a charge of deep feeling of love and bhakti that the Swami would refer to Sri Totakacharya and exalt his devotion to Sri Sankara, his guru.

"Adi Sankaracharya", he said[1] had four sishyas (disciples), one of whom was Totaka who would not talk much but was only intent on doing his duties. Acharya Sankara wanted his other disciples to notice Totaka's keen devotion. Once, after the daily lesson had started, Sri Sankara, observing the absence of Totaka, stopped the lesson and said: "Let Totaka also come; then we shall proceed." The other disciples, who did not have a high regard for Totaka, said rather derisively that it was not of significance whether Totaka heard the lessons or not. "Of what purpose is his hearing the lessons?" they asked (proud of their scholarship, even forgetting the presence of their guru). The Acharya immediately called out for Totaka, who, in his profound spirit of service, had gone to wash the clothes of the guru. The moment Totaka heard his guru calling him, he came in running, repeating with the Master's grace the famous verses "Viditakhila Sastra Sudha Jaladhe. . . . Bhava Sankara Desika Me Saranam" (later came to be known as 'Totakashtakam'). The disciples were awe-struck by his devotion to the guru and hearing the verses replete with emotion and guru bhakti, were moved to ecstasy."

Such is the rich heritage the Swami had inherited and no wonder he emulated the illustrious disciple of Sri Sankara in his own adoration of Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami, Srinagar, Kashmir.

We are told[2] that after his visit to Kamarupa and victory

[1] G.I.V., p. 340.

[2] Agamananda in his introduction to Sankara's Sarva Vedanta Siddhanta Sagaram (or The Quintessence of Vedanta).

over Abhinava Gupta, Acharya Sankara toured Kashmir and after defeating in argument the Buddhists and Sakthas there, he ascended the seat of learning known as 'Sarvagna peeta' in Srinagar, Kashmir, and that it was at this time that he met his Paramaguru Gaudapada. It was Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami coming in this line of the sannyasins of the Jyotir Mutt that gave us a sadguru in Sri Gnanananda.

The Swami would be lost in divine fervour at the mere mention of the name of Acharya Sankara and his own guru. He would himself recite with deep emotion the lines of Guru Parampara sloka whenever the disciples were slow in catching up with it. It was indeed true education to watch him emphasize each syllable or nudge the disciples to repeat:[1]

"Dakshinamurthi – samarambham Sankaracharya – madhyamam
Asmadacharya paryantam vande guru paramparam
Narayanam Padmabhuvam Vashishtam Saktim cha tat putra—
Parasaram cha
Vyasam Sukam Goudapadam mahantam Govinda — yogindra
mathasya sishyam
Sri Sankaracharya mathasya Padmapadam cha Hastamalakam
cha sishyam
Tam Totakam Vartikakaram anyam asmad — gurum
santhatha — manathosmi"

"It is essential", says Suta Samhitha, "that the disciple knows the tradition of the spiritual knowledge received from one's guru in order that this knowledge may be fruitful".

In the book 'Heritage of Sri Gnanananda' Sri K. N. Subramanyam states:

[1] G.I.V., p. 117.

"The work Muttamnayasethu gives the following details concerning the Jyotir Mutt.

The Mutt created for Uttaramnya shall be known as Jyotir Mutt.

The other name of the Mutt is Srimutt.

The special attainment that will find manifestation is Bliss.

The names of the pontiffs are Giri, Parvatha and Sagara.

The holy place of the Mutt is Badrikasrama.

The God of the Mutt is Narayana.

The Goddess for worship is Purnagiri.

The Acharya of the Mutt is Totaka.

The holy water of the Mutt is Alaknanda.

The Brahmachari is called as Ananda.

The Mahavakya of the Mutt is 'Ayamatma Brahma'.

The Veda for recitation is Atharva Veda.

The Gothra is known as 'Brigu'.

The places called Kuru, Kambhoja and Kashmir are its domain.

The Pontiff is called as Giri for he ever lives in the mountain, is devoted to the study of Gita and is of very deep and unshakable mind.

He is called as Parvatha because he lives at the foot of the mountain, is endowed with rich wisdom and knows the worth of things.

He is called as Sagara because he is as deep as the ocean of Truth, has in possession the jewel of wisdom and never violates the worldly conventions.

He is known as Nandavara because he belongs to that tradition of the sanyasis who impart Ananda to worldly men.

He is known as Ananda because as knower of Truth,

he ever contemplates the Reality which is Consciousness unconditioned and revels in the Bliss of the Self.

Significantly, while dealing with some amnayas under 'Seshamnayas' Sri Sankara mentions one 'Niskalamnaya' in which the distinctive feature of the tradition is worship of the Holy Sandals of Sri Guru and the Acharya is Sadguru."

The Swami was always totally absorbed at the time of the worship of guru padukas (sandals of the guru).

The Pada Puja or the worship of the Padukas of Acharya Sankara and Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami takes place almost everyday at the ashram at Tirukoilur, named by the Swami as Gnanananda Tapovanam.

Why did the Swami name the Ashram as Gnanananda Tapovanam?

"The compound word 'Gnananandam' in Sanskrit means either knowledge which is itself bliss (gnanameva anandam) or both knowledge and bliss (gnanamscha anandamscha). The Ultimate Reality is described in the Upanishads as Satyam, Gnanam, Anantam Brahma. Anandam Brahma is also of the same nature, that is it is both knowledge and bliss. Further, the word 'Gnanananda' also indicates that knowledge is the sole means to Bliss, (gnanaadevaanandam) and thus reminds us of the scriptural statement — gnanaa-deva kaivalyam."[1]

The Taittiriya Upanishad says: "Om. He who knows Brahman attains the supreme." On the above, the following mantra (Rik) is recorded:

"He who knows Brahman, which is Reality,
Knowledge and Infinity,

[1] Grace Abounding, p. 22.

Hidden in the cave of the heart and in the
Highest akasa — he, being one
With the omniscient Brahman, enjoys
Simultaneously all desires."

The words 'Brahman which is Reality, Knowledge and Infinity' give the complete definition of the Brahman. The three words *Reality* (*Satyam*), *Knowledge* (*Gnanam*), *Infinity* (*Anantam*) are the qualifying adjuncts of the substratum Brahman. These three adjuncts are independent of one another and directly connected with Brahman; that is to say, Brahman is Satyam, Brahman is Gnanam and Brahman is Anantam."[1]

Anandam (bliss) has necessarily to be Gnana. It is pure consciounsess, its existence also being knowledge. Thus ananda also comes out of gnana just as knowledge flows out of bliss. Knowledge is inherent in love and love inherent in knowledge; gnana is Brahman and Brahman is ananda-ghana. "You too" says Vivekachudamani,[2] "realising this supreme truth of the nature of the Atman which is compacted of bliss (anandaghana), discarding the delusion which is the product of your mind's imagination, wake up, become free and fulfil the purpose of your life. Through samadhi in which the mind has been perfectly stilled, perceive the truth of the atman by the clear eye of the understanding".

The Self is not only Existence and Consciousness. It is also Supreme Bliss. 'Brahman is Knowledge — Bliss.'[3] Many passages in the Upanishads declare that Reality is the nature of Supreme Bliss. In the Taittiriya Upanishad, Brigu guided by his father Varuna's definition of Brahman

[1] Commentary by Sri Sankara on Taittiriya Up. II.i.3.
[2] V.V.C. Verse 473, 474.
[3] Brih. Up. III.ix.28.7.

as the cause of the origination, sustentation and destruction of the Universe, decides through inquiry that gross matter, vital air, mind and intellect cannot be Brahman and arrives at the discovery that Ananda or Bliss is Brahman "for, from Bliss, verily are these things born; by Bliss, when born, do they live; into Bliss (at the time of dissolution) do they enter, do they merge".[1]

In the Chhandogya Upanishad, Sanat Kumara first instructs Narada about the nature of Bliss as "That which is verily Infinite (Bhuma) is Bliss. There is no Bliss in the finite (alpa). Only the Infinite is Bliss. One must desire to know the Infinite."[2] Then he proceeds to describe Bhuma which is Brahman, in the famous passage 'When one does not see anything else' etc. In it, it is pointed out that in the Infinite, which is immortal, the threefold distinctions of empirical usage, namely, knower, knowledge and object of knowledge do not exist. Therefore the Infinite which is Bliss is non-dual. The Infinite which is poornam or full is also seen to be self-luminous and of the nature of Bliss in the states of sleep and samadhi. Thus, That which is Infinite is Bliss, non-dual and self-luminous. It is Bliss, eternal and unbroken, same and unchanging, without beginning and end.

Such is the connotative richness of the word 'Gnanananda-nandam'.

Equally immense is the significance in the choice of the word 'Tapovanam'. "Worshipping the gods, the twice-born, teachers and wise men, purity, straightforwardness, continence and abstinence from injury are called the 'tapas' (austerity) of the body. The speech which causes no excitement and is true, as also pleasant and beneficial and also

[1] Taittiriya Upanishad. III.vi.
[2] Chhandogya Upanishad (VII.xxiii).

the practice of sacred recitation, are said to form the austerity of speech. Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, silence, self-control, purity of nature, — this is called the austerity of the mind."[1] The Swami was not merely referring to this tapas but to the highest stage of contemplation, the remaining in the state of supreme Bliss, past all thoughts of bondage and release, abiding in the service of the Supreme. The Realization of That which subsists when all trace of 'I' is gone, is true austerity (tapas). So sings Ramana[2] 'the self of all' "The *jnani* may not appear to a superficial observer as a *tapasvi* (a man of austerities); in fact, he is the greatest of *tapasvis*, as his *tapas* is spontaneous Awareness of the Self, is constant, bereft of the least trace of individual effort. The process of ridding oneself of the ego also is very severe *tapas* — involving the sacrifice of everything including the sacrificing of self — an excellent form of tapas."

"Seek to know Brahman by means of austerities. For austerities are (the means of knowing) Brahman" says Taittiriya Upanisahd.[3] "The term 'tapas' is derived from TAP meaning 'to give heat' or 'to suffer pain'. Tapas implies a concentration of the senses and the mind, a mastery of will and thought by the habitual practice of exercising restraint over the bodily desires and affections which are linked to lower objects so that the aspirant may advance in the life of holiness." Therefore tapas is hailed as "the primary and most effective means of attaining realization of Brahman".

The Taittiriya Upanishad goes on to point out that "the higher purpose of tapas is a withdrawal of the mind from

[1] Gita (Ch. XVII. Verses 14–16).
[2] Upadesa Saram (translated by B. V. Narasimhaswamy) Verse. 30
[3] Tait. UP. III (2).

hindrances and temptations of the world and flesh and the clarifying of its vision to be able to perceive what is spiritual and true. Hence getting rid of cravings and focussing all the energies of the mind on the Divine Reality is the purest and highest form of tapas."

Thus the scripture places the highest ideal before us by saying 'Meditation on the Supreme is tapas par excellence'.

Such was the ideal the Swami set for his inmates at the ashram.

We cannot do better than go to the Swami himself for an exposition of the symbolic charge of the name Tapovanam.

" 'Tapas' is intense heat with its derivations, zeal, fervour, austerity, asceticism. 'Vana' (in Tamil 'vanam') is a wood or forest. In olden days there were huge jungles and forests in India where hermits could retire far from other men, living off fruit and wild roots and spending their time contemplating the things of God. Nowadays, in this part of the land at least, there are no longer any real forests. The trees have been felled and the countryside transformed. So, as there are no longer any forests, it is absolutely essential to set aside certain places so that those who wish to lead a quiet life of prayer and asceticism can do so. This ashram was founded for those who wish to devote even a fraction of their time to the pursuit of spiritual wisdom far from crowds and from the turmoil of the daily round. Here they can receive proper instruction and give themselves up to meditation."[1]

'Vanam' itself can be taken as mind, an abode of peace and tranquillity, radiating from a divine personage. In short 'Gnanananda Tapovanam' embodies the conception of a hallowed spot where keen aspirants could engage

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 38.

themselves in unremitting effort to realise their vedantic ideal in Swami Gnanananda by constant contemplation of the Self.

The Swami, however, did not insist that a retreat like an ashram was a requisite for realization. As a Jivanmukta an ativarnashrami, he ran the ashram in a special way. While he insisted on discipline, austerity and devotional fervour, he did not run the ashram according to the popular notions of the organization of ashrams. There was freedom from regulations and rules in his presence. The Swami built a big hall within a short period of seven days. True devotees were even permitted to conduct weddings there, in which the Swami took lively interest. The ashram inmates were a heterogeneous lot but the Swami's personality surcharged the atmosphere with purity, true love and surrender. Everything in the ashram was centred around him and around total dedication to him.

The Swami established an ashram also at Yercaud. It was the Swami's view that Yercaud was eminently suited for performing tapas and a fit place for contemplation. "Ithu viseshamana idamakkum (a place of special significance)" he would say. "Tapas panna ukantha idam (ideal for performing tapas)". Therefore he established a meditation centre here, called 'Gnanananda Pranava Nilayam'. He liked Yercaud and very frequently visited it. He reminisced that he had stayed there long before and that a number of siddhas were (even now) living in the caves there. It is generally believed that the whole of the Kolli Range is sacred. The Swami is said to have wandered about in these hills as an avaduta, eating only jack fruits and honey.

It is significant that there is no ritual worship of any sort in Yercaud. It was created for the pursuit of self-enquiry. Particularly initiate trainees were sent there to develop the necessary mental culture for their sadhana. Again some

of the sannyasins who were ripe and well trained by the Swami, were sent to Yercaud to spend their days in deep contemplation.

Sat Sanga

True, all of us are not possessed by an unquenchable passion as to take a plunge headlong into the ocean of bhakti and gnana. After all it is very difficult for ordinary mortals to liberate themselves from the pulls and pressures of life. But with all its variety and attractive trifles, the Swami assures us, that there is no need to despair. Besides opening ourselves through bhajan and prayer, the Swami suggests that there is another way. If we cannot all become ablaze with the love of the Real, we can at least seek the atmosphere of holiness, love and Godliness in Sat sanga or the association with the men of God. That is what the ashram provides.

The Swami repeatedly stressed the necessity and value of sat sanga. When a disciple approached him and said "Swami, I have put in my best efforts; but I have not been able to attain chitta suddhi (purity of mind)". The Swami answered: "The only cure for this is sat sanga. All your kalankas, blemishes, will vanish if you resort to sat sanga."

The Yoga Vasishta considers sat sanga as one of the four doorways to moksha. It says, "The company of the wise removes the darkness of the heart, leads one to the right way, and causes the sun of wisdom to shine in one's mind. He who bathes in the cool and holy Ganga of the company of the wise, does not stand in need of penances, pilgrimage, charity or sacrifice".

Sat sanga is the first step towards the taste of Real Delight. It will gradually purify, cleanse one's consciousness and check the downward gravitation. There will be a

progressive replacement of such qualities as lust, greed, pride and jealousy by sattvic virtues such as absence of pride, non-violence, purity, fearlessness and other divine tendencies like devotion, truthfulness, love, faith, goodness and consecration.

The Swami transports this idea into a different key by a telling metaphor. "The antidote for the breeze from a tamarind tree is that from a neem tree. He who wanders in a tamarind grove will inevitably develop various diseases. If he is made to stay near neem trees for some time, inhaling their healthy breeze, he will be cured of the diseases in due course."[1] Thus, man who is subject to the two harmful gunas (tamas and rajas) which are alien to his real nature, will find sat sanga a balmy influence. It enables him to develop the sattvic quality which is the real nature of the mind and which helps the mind turn towards concentration. And thus he explains the famous verse from Bhajagovindam of Sri Sankara:[2] By living close to those great souls who have experienced divinity and who are themselves liberated beings, we develop detachment and through detachment, freedom from delusion; this leads to equanimity, a state of calm unshakable faith and concentration in the mind, and thence to final liberation or 'Jivanmukti'.

In ordinary parlance sat sanga connotes doing bhajan, listening to discourses of the devout, seeking the company of sages and saints. This is true, but is however on a lower plane. With the Swami there is a higher reach of sat sanga — not so apparent or simple and so much more difficult to attain but very essential. This is achieving union with or remaining in a state of laya or harmony with 'Sat' — that which is Self-existent, Real.

[1] G.I.V., p. 175.
[2] G.I.V., p. 332.

The Swami himself is the personification of that 'Sat'. An old lady came to the Sadguru and wailed that she was a great sinner and was bound to go to hell. Smiling characteristically, the Swami quipped that she could not go to hell even if she would, once she had sought a gnani, a sadhu. One cannot think of a more powerful exposition of the concept of sat sanga.[1]

Sadhana

The sadhaka must make an intense effort to seek the company of Sat in this life itself; for, as the Swami stressed, human life is invaluable. "Man", the Swami would say, "walks upright, his eyes lifted to the starry heavens above, and it is so fitting that man of all creatures has the most seemly body. He is not facing earthwards, like all other animals but is upright facing heavenwards". Never was the Swami tired of pointing out that to be born a human being is the rarest privilege.[2] A human being does not just have the five senses alone; he has a sixth sense which he must use. A true guru, the Swami emphasizes the value of the twin requisites of intensity of aspiration and urgency of pursuit.[3]

If, thus, on the one hand the Swami wanted the devotees to have faith in the guru and the Divine, on the other he firmly held that without human endeavour and aspiration (which is always symbolized as fire in our scriptures) on the part of the seeker nothing could be achieved. It is true

[1] For a full account of this episode see p. 332–333 of G.I.V.

[2] Sankara, in Viveka Chudamani, in the famous third verse which emphasizes the rarity of human birth, goes on to say: "These three are difficult to obtain: to be born as a man, to have the longing for release and the association with great souls. They are the results of divine grace."

[3] G.I.V., p. 284, 310–312.

that the guru operates. But, as he tells Swami Abhishiktananda,[1] "the grace of the guru, the grace of the Lord is the seed sown in the earth. It never fails to bear fruit, but is it sufficient just to sow the seed into the earth? Is it not necessary to prepare the soil, manure it and water it? Elaborating further, he says: "Once the seed has been sown, must not one continue to water the land and pull out the weeds?" He sums up with a finality: "All that is the effort which no one can avoid and without it Grace cannot do its work in you!" Effort lends us Grace.

In what does this effort consist? The Swami beautifully answers by a question. "Can you make a fire with green wood? You must first cut it down to chips, then dry them. Only then they will catch fire. The fire is the grace and the preparation of the wood, the sadhana or the effort, made by the person who truly wishes to succeed." Even a clever query from an intelligent disciple cannot disarm him. "Does not the fruit one puts in the sun ripen on its own?" "There is still the need to put it in the sun", boomerangs the answer.[2] "This is precisely sadhana."

Thus the Swami unfolds the three essential requisites for sadhana (i) self effort ('muyarchi thiruvinaiyakkum') (ii) grace of the Divine ('Thiruvarul koottivaikkum') (iii) time will ripen ('Paruvatthal andri pazha').

This does not, however, diminish the momentous importance of urgency with which one must pursue the efforts. If effort is to be ceaseless, aspiration must be an all-con-

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 92; see also G.I.V., p. 177.

One cannot leave things to fate; effort is necessary even as a man being swept away by floods in a river struggles to swim ashore if he can or obtains, shouting, the help of a person who knows swimming, or seeks the assistance of a boatman; or catches hold of creepers or trees on the river bank and thus saves his own life.

[2] G.I.V., p. 364.

suming fire. It must be an all-devouring passion. As the saying goes, one must be able to say of a seeker: "The zeal of God has eaten him up!" Nothing short of God's love must please him. A tepid wish can never achieve it. The Swami reminding us of the simile in Vedanta, says:[1] "If your clothes catch fire, and if there is a pond nearby, you dash down towards it, without stopping to think and throw yourself head first into the water."

Thus his emphasis on 'purushaprayatna' (intense effort) reveals the deep influence Yoga Vasishta had on him. The Swami, like all great seers, drew attention to the place of ego in aspiring for the ultimate achievement. It is that which helps the seeker to muster his energies and make them single pointed. Of course at the end the ego too is offered to the Divine. In the words of Ramana Maharishi, "the stick (ego) which helped in cremating various other bodies by pushing them into the funeral blaze (gnana vichara or quest of wisdom) is itself in the end burnt up in the same blaze".[2]

While the Swami emphasizes that persistent, continuous exertion is necessary for the sadhana, he has also given a seemingly contrary injunction 'Summa iru' — Be still, quiet.[3] He does not mean by that a tamasic or a lethargic state. On the other hand, it is part of the effort to overcome tamas by rajas or kinesis and rajas by sattva with its qualities of intelligence, goodness and peace, and this sattva itself by suddhasattva whose effect is the realization of one's own self and establishment in the Absolute.

Transcendance of the three gunas result in one becoming worthy of being one with the Brahman. It is therefore clear

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 93.
[2] Upadesa Saram, p. 52.
[3] G.I.V., p. 431 enunciates the way to still the mind.

that 'summa iru' — be still — is not an injunction for beginners but for contemplatives in an advanced state of spiritual development, who have renounced all action and are in gnananishta.

Actually, the Swami equates this state with samadhi.[1] Expounding 'manonasa' or annihilation of the mind[2] he describes the effort necessary for its achievement. During the period of abhyasa or practice, the sadhaka must eliminate thoughts, by being witness to them and ceasing to give them volition (sankalpa). He ends up by saying, to allow this mind, freed of all thought, to be lost in the atman is 'summa iruppathu'. What is more significant, such a state is a delight, bliss.[3]

Citing the well-known analogy of the mind as a monkey, the Swami points out, all thoughts and volition feed the mind; when the mind is controlled (though that is difficult), it leads to a rare joy.

He illustrates this by a story. There was a sadhu in a temple who used to be given a bowl of rice for food for ringing the temple bell. One day the authorities appointed a servant to do the job and ordained that the servant be given one measure of rice, while the sadhu two measures. Someone protested saying that the dispensation was unfair and insisted that the sadhu should clear out. "It is not all that easy to remain quiet without doing anything" challenged a few others. They made some people sit in the sadhu's place, who found it very difficult to remain quiet and soon left confessing defeat. The sadhu was recalled and was given two measures of rice!

[1] G.I.V., p. 67: In the catechism with his disciple Chinna Arumuga Patthar, the Swami equates this actionless state with the state of realization of the Brahman.
[2] G.I.V., p. 422–423.
[3] GIV.., p. 426.

The Swami spells out the meaning thus: It is extremely difficult to remain in a state of quietitude. The paradox is that even that requires intense effort.

The sadhana prescribed by the Swami differed from person to person, determined as it was by the latent tendencies and potentialities of the individual. The Swami assigned a very important role to karma yoga or desireless and dedicated action, as the only means for attaining chitta suddhi, purity of mind. Of course, he starts out by pointing to[1] the traditional position that karma is not necessary for atmagnana or knowledge of the Self and in fact they are contradictory and incompatible. For, as he says, after attaining realization whatever action one does, one does it for the good of the world and one gathers no fresh momentum. However, dispassionate action in the case of a beginner leads him to attain inner purity which then becomes an instrument for achieving knowledge. He, therefore, equates bhakti with karma.[2] That karma is best which is discharged with the awareness that all action is done according to Divine will and we are merely instruments,[3] and we offer all our action to the Divine. Thus, karma yoga is bhakti in action, and real egoless action is possible only for a liberated man.

Renunciation of the fruits of action is the real test of karma yoga. At the initial stage, however, one is asked to do good deeds. Even this is only a preparatory discipline. The Swami asks us to give up both the evil and the good

[1] G.I.V., p. 405.

[2] G.I.V., p. 342.

[3] Swami ridicules the egoism and vanity of doership, as follows: A man boasting that he accomplished this or that is as ridiculous and vain as a lizard saying that it kept a building in tact, preventing it from collapsing or the claim that a host of mosquitoes could make a tower collapse.

deeds, as both are a weight, a bondage, one an iron chain, the other a golden chain, but none the less a chain. And both bind us to sorrow and delusion. We must get rid of both if we want 'to go up', as he puts it.

In this connection it is interesting to see how the Swami trained his monastic disciples bearing in mind their swadharma and swabhava. After joining the Swami, for about ten years a sannyasin, Swami Mukundananda Saraswati, was placed in charge of the management of the temple and of editing the ashram magazines 'The Light Divine' and 'Gnana Oli'. Only when he entered the stage of nididhyasana was he completely relieved of all responsibilities and given the necessary seclusion.

Another sannyasin, Swami Dasa Giri, to cite another example, continued to be a karma yogi till the end. The Swami wrote to him in September 1972 thus on the glory of karma yoga: "To perform action at the sublimest heights of karma yoga, reposing in the Self and with constant awareness of That and being one with That is the beatific state of Self-Realization, is that Matchless Transcendental Bliss Itself." It is to be mentioned here that in the year 1969 when this sannyasin was relieved of the responsibilities as the manager of the ashram, he was given the necessary seclusion for meditation. He made very remarkable strides with his guru's blessings, within a short time. He had received in an extraordinary measure the grace of the

[1] G.I.V., p. 347–348.

cf.: Vivekananda in the 'The Song of the Sannyasin':

"Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
Of shining gold, or darker, baser ore;
Love, hate — good, bad — and all the dual throng.
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free,
For fetters though of gold, are not less strong to bind
Then, off with them, sannyasin bold!"

Swami who guided the course of his spiritual sadhana till his departure from the body.

It is only when a degree of purity of mind has been attained through karma yoga and the aspirant has been psychically awakened by bhakti that he is introduced to the path of inquiry consisting of sravana or hearing the Truth, manana or reflection and nididhyasana or meditation.

The Swami was particular that the seeker should have developed to a substantial extent sadhana chatushtaya or the four-fold means of attainment of self-realization; (i) viveka or discrimination (ii) vairagya or dispassion (iii) samadhi shatsampathi [consisting of the six virtues — sama (calmness of mind), dama (control of senses), uparati (self-withdrawal), titiksha (forbearance), sraddha (faith), samadhana (self-settledness)] and (iv) mumukshutva or aspiration for liberation.

"The qualification of the desire to know Brahman accrues only to a man of discrimination and detachment, who is endowed with the virtues of sama etc. and who yearns for liberation."[1] In 'Jiva, Iswara, Jagat' the Swami affirms:[2] "Self-knowledge is the goal of human life (as it bestows Bliss of Atman here and Immortality hereafter). Only those who have through supreme devotion developed an ever vigilant viveka or discrimination between the Real and the unreal are competent to enter the path of Self-knowledge." Here, 'viveka' mentioned by the Swami is indicative of 'sadhana chatushtaya' or the fourfold pre-requisites of philosophical discipline essential for realization of the Truth.

Viveka is the firm conviction of the mind that the Brahman

[1] Vivekachudamani; verse 17.

[2] 'Jiva, Iswara, Jagat' in G.I.V., p. 202.

is real and the universe is illusory. Sankara defines it in his classic manner as follows: "The firm understanding that reality is Brahman and that the material world (jagat) is mithya is spoken of as discrimination between the eternal and the transient (nityanitya vastu viveka)."[1]

Vairagya is the renunciation of desire for enjoyment of fruits of actions here on earth or elsewhere in heaven. "Vairagya (detachment) is revulsion from all that has been seen and heard, from all transient objects of enjoyment beginning with the body and upto Brahman." The Swami laid great emphasis on this total renunciation.[2]

The third is a group of six virtues. *Sama* or the calmness of mind, "detaching the mind from the manifold sense pleasures again and again perceiving their pernicious character, resting it permanently on one's objective". *Dama* or control of senses, of knowledge and of action — "the retention of both kinds of senses in their respective orbs, withdrawing them from sense-objects". *Uparati* or non-externalization of the mind giving up all outer activity by fixing the mind on its target firmly. In its ultimate reaches "the pre-eminent uparati is the mind ceasing to function through anything external". *Titiksha* or "endurance of all afflictions without countering aids and without anxiety or lament". *Sraddha* or faith in the truth of the scriptures — "ascertainment of the scripture and of the words of the guru with conviction about their truth is called shraddha by the good and as that by which knowledge of Reality is obtained". *Samadhana* or self-settledness — is concentration — making every effort to fix the mind on pure Brahman. Ultimately "the perfect establishment of the buddhi always in the Nirguna Brahman is said to be samadhana, not the indulgence of the mind."

[1] Vivekachudamani; verse 20.

[2] G.I.V., p. 427, 435.

And finally *mumukshutva* is the yearning for liberation from all bondages superimposed by ignorance from that of egoism to that of the body. "Mumukshutva is the desire to free the mind from the bonds extending from the ahankara, egoism to the body created by agnana, ignorance, by means of knowledge of one's real nature."[1]

Only a person endowed with these qualities, who is desirous of realizing the truth of the Atman should humbly approach the guru who has achieved atmagnana, who is an ocean of immutable wisdom, is pure as crystal, is calm and magnanimous, who is a reservoir of mercy and rests calmly in Brahman like a fire that has consumed its fuel. For it is he who confers emancipation. Knowledge of one's true self arises from his upadesa — instruction, and freedom from the bondage caused by ignorance is accomplished.

Guru bhakti

Bhagavan Ramana assures us, "He that has earned the grace of the Guru, shall undoubtedly be saved, never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape. But the disciple, for his part, should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master". So he exhorted, "Submit to me and I will strike down the mind".

Swami Gnanananda also significantly declares: "A true disciple has no sadhana to perform. He has only to surrender himself completely to his guru." Nothing could be simpler for the aspirant if there is the proper attitude. Nothing could be nobler than the guru's willingness to take over the disciple.

[1] Vivekachudamani, Verses 20–28.

The Swami preached Nyasa Vidya and lived it. He believed in the spontaneity of surrender, the totality, the absoluteness of it. There is no half-way house here. Without asking for anything in return, making a total holocaust of oneself, one must surrender so that the Divine can lead one to the grace of Light.

Time and again the Swami has reiterated that we can attain realization only through the guidance and blessings of the guru. Scholar or illiterate, no one can succeed without a master. Even in the Vedic age, the seekers learned in all the shastras sought a guru to enlighten them. Narada went to Sanatkumara, Indra to Brahma, Suka to King Janaka. Chhandogya Upanishad asserts, "Study of Sruti, scriptures, works of authority cannot give the delivering knowledge — only by knowledge received direct from the guru does one attain to the most beneficent".[1] The Hindu tradition thus places a firm emphasis on the need for surrendering to the guru and receiving everything from him.[2]

The Swami points out in no uncertain terms that however much one may be learned in the vedas and the agamas, knowledge does not bear fruit in opening up the path of gnana to the aspirant if it is not received through the guru. Whatever efforts one may make, one can never get over the delusion of the jiva without the help of the guru.[3] He enhances the sacredness attached to the role of the guru and guru parampara (the tradition or line of gurus) in the pursuit of knowledge.

[1] Ch. Up.4.9.3.

[2] Discussing the essential need for a guru even for a person as advanced as Krishna Bai, Swami Ramadas says, "She got a peg on which she hung her ego; that peg is here (pointing out to Ramadas) and she is now without ego. She has done so just as you hang your coat on the peg".

[3] G.I.V., p. 99.

"Guror gurutharam nasti guroranyam na bhavayeth
Gurorvartham katham caiva gurornama sada japeth"

'There is no one greater than the guru. Do not think of anyone other than the guru. Meditate on the guru's upadesa and his life and repeat his name incessantly.'

"Gururreva param brahma gururreva pāra gatih
Gururreva para vidya gururreva parayanam
Gururreva parah kamah Gururreva param dhanam"

'The guru alone is Param Brahman; He alone the best refuge. The guru alone is the true knowledge; and he alone the best means. The guru alone is the summum bonum. He alone the priceless treasure.'

The Swami also points out in unmistakable terms that the guru is Brahmaswarupa. "There is absolutely no difference between the guru and Iswara. 'Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnuh Gurur Devo Maheswarah' signifies the same thing. The guru is Trimurti swarupa. It is the self same guru who transcends the Trimurtis as the Nirguna Brahman. 'Guru sakcat parabrahma tasmai Sri guruve namah'. Our atma swarupa and the parabrahman are identical. Hence, Iswara, guru and atman are one and the same."[1]

"The form of the Guru is the root of Dhyana;
The lotus feet of the guru is the root of Pooja;
The word of the guru is the root of the Mantra and
The grace of the guru is the root of Siddhi."[2]

— Kularnava

[1] G.I.V., p. 336.
[2] Kularnava, Verse 90. Ullasa, 13.

"After studying law" says the Swami, "one must be apprenticed to a well-known lawyer to understand the nuances of the law. Similarly a spiritual aspirant must seek the guidance of a guru to initiate him in the spiritual path."[1]

The ignorance of men can never be dispelled without the aid of a true master. Study of vedanta and shastras may at the most help one in intellectual advancement, but will not help in spiritual growth, for erudition is not experience. It is only by the fascinating contact with a realized soul that one can be helped to actualize one's spiritual potentialities.

Book learning, says Sri M. P. Pandit,[2] remains a mental knowledge, ritual becomes mechanical routine, unless they are energised by the personality of the guru. It is only those acts that are inspired by the guru that yield bhakti and mukti.

Whatever may be the level of the aspirant, the guru must be held in the highest esteem. The Tatvopadesa[3] says that persons yearning for liberation, who have gratitude and discrimination, should venerate and serve the guru who is Brahma swarupa itself in person. Did not Adi Sankara set an example by showing that even for a gnani guru bhakti is essential?

"Caksurgamyam gurum tyaktva
Sastragamyam tu yah smaret
Karasthamudagam tyaktva ghanastham abhivanchati"

— Vihageswaram

[1] G.I.V., p. 317.
[2] A part of material for this section is abstracted from the chapter 'The Guru-Sishya Tradition" in "Studies in the Vedas and the Tantra", by M. P. Pandit.
[3] Verse 5.

'One who turns away from the guru and seeks to understand the Divine by scanning the shastras can be likened to one who pours out the water held in one's hands in favour of the distant rain clouds.'

"Sulabham tu gurum tyaktva durlabham ya upasate
baddham tyaktva dhanam mudhah guptamanyeshate kshithau"

— Sri Sathvathasam

'One who turns away from the guru who is near at hand and seeks to meditate on the Divine which is difficult of attainment, may be likened to one who throws away the treasure he already has and goes in search of a hidden treasure.'

The Swami, answering a disciple who sought to know the significance of the refrain 'Tatah kim' in Sankara's Guru Ashtaka, said: " 'Tatah kim' means 'What is the good of that?' What is the good of anything if one cannot give oneself up to the holy feet of the sadguru? Of what use is money, scholarship or fame? A host of relatives or control of mind? Even as a sumptuous feast without salt is tasteless and cannot be eaten, even so futile are all our accomplishments without guru bhakti. If one has guru bhakti that alone is sufficient; there is nothing beyond it; nothing else is required; this is the underlying meaning."[1]

Thus, tradition and experience affirm that realization of the Divine spirit through the intercession of the guru is the only sure way to liberation.

Who is a guru? Guru means the great one. The etymological significance of the word 'guru' is given in Guru Gita. "The syllable 'Gu' means darkness; and the syllable

[1] G.I.V., p. 335.

'Ru' denotes light. The guru is undoubtedly Brahman, who dispels all darkness. The syllable 'Gu' means darkness; the syllable 'Ru' denotes the dispeller of darkness. As his is the nature of one who destroys the darkness (of ignorance in his disciple), he (the preceptor) is called guru. The syllable 'Gu' signifies one who has transcended the three gunas (of sattva, rajas and tamas); and the syllable 'Ru' means one who is beyond forms. Because he is beyond gunas and forms, he is called guru. The first syllable 'Gu' means that which makes manifest Maya and gunas; 'Ru' is the Para Brahman, Higher Brahman that removes both Maya and delusion."

A guru is one who is himself a realized soul.

"Acinoti hi sastrarthan achare sthapayatyapi
Svayamacharate yasmat tasmadacharya ucyate"

'An Acharya is one who not only explains the esoteric significance of the shastras to his disciple but leads his life according to them and bids his disciple to do so likewise. It is said that only a person who is firmly established in Brahman, who has conquered lust, anger, jealousy and other negative qualities, who has studied Vedanta siddhanta sastras and has understood their real import, who has done meditation on Brahman for twelve years and has become one with it, who is super-eminent and is ever at peace, is qualified to be a guru.'[1]

Swami tells Abhishiktananda that guru is a seer who can safely and effortlessly transmit an endless line of people across the tumultuous ocean that this life is, to liberation, to the shore of delight. He says[2] "He alone is the guru who

[1] V.V.C., 34–35.
[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 108.

can make one take the high dive." Further he expounds the profound role of the guru by a homely image. The guru is the instrument of the Divine who, like an efficient merchant, sorts out 'pepper corns from the mustard seeds or rice from millet'.[1] He ironically goes on to ask what is the use of setting up shop if the merchant cannot recognize his own goods?

True, all did not go to the Swami with the firm resolve of a dedicated aspirant. As the Gita has it, as with Iswara, people approach the guru with different motives. There were the physically afflicted pathetically waiting for a sign which would relieve them of their sufferings, the seekers of knowledge keen on solving their doubts, the seekers of material wealth who were anxious for the Swami's blessings on their business ventures and the real mumukshu, aspirant for liberation, who sought the Truth and nothing but the Truth. It was remarkable that the Swami never forgot or ignored the nature of this vyavaharika prapancha or the relative, practical world. To each according to his due, to each according to his need and capacity, was his principle. He would remember always the adhikaratva, the level of the devotee. In his infinite grace he would come down to the level of each devotee and his all embracing love poured through his eyes. Nothing was withheld. His grace overflowed and was lavished on all. This might even seem arbitrary and gratuitous. But the Swami with his uncanny intuition could divine the deepest of the devotees' needs and potentialities.

How does one discover one's guru when the Swami specifically deprecates the idea of running after gurus?

The Swami has a short pithy answer. "When the disciple is ready, the guru will automatically appear on the scene. Only those who are not yet worthy spend their time running

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 109.

after gurus."[1] One can't have better proof of this miracle of intuitive perception than the way Swami Abhishiktananda came to feel soon after coming to Tapovanam (where he came only as a 'tourist', as a curious visitor), that at last he had discovered his guru, at last he had got his answers to all the questions that were troubling him. Swami Abhishiktananda marvels how his guru came to him without his own volition. Therein lies the secret and the glory of the whole tradition.

The sceptic in us still raises the question 'How do we realize that we have come to the point of meeting the guru and getting his help?'

The Swami replies through a dramatic episode: "I am going to explain to you what a guru is. Suppose you are proceeding along a straight road beside a river. Suddenly you find yourself in front of a steep cliff. There is no exit. The way is blocked right and left. The only way out is to climb, but the cliff is so steep that you are unable to do so. You try and try but each time you fall back. Then you cry loud and shout for help — 'appa, amma, appa, amma. . . .' — like children. That is Bhakti, the way of devotion, calling to the Lord who can do all things. Now, while you are crying out for help you become suddenly aware that something brushed past you. You look up. It is a rope that has been let down to you from the top of the cliff. Someone is up there; someone has already arrived. He is holding an end of the rope. He shouts down to you, 'catch hold of it and hold tight!' He is the guru."[2]

When the guru in his infinite love rushes to help the devotee, the helpless human being, the devotee in his turn must trust the guru completely. He must have the 'shraddha'

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 29.
[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 109.

or faith (the most essential thing) and abandon himself to the guru. To put it simply, he must catch hold of the rope if he wants to save himself. How true even at the physical level!

Thus there are two sides to this bond. In the words of a great mystic and seer, "There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a Supreme Grace from above that answers".[1] He reiterates it as follows: "To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril, disaster, only two things are needed — the grace of the Divine Mother (of whom the guru is the embodiment) and on your side an inner state made up of faith, sincerity and surrender."

The guru is to the chela (disciple) the manifestation of God himself. The devotion to the guru is for him the best help beyond all external and murthi (icon) worship, in his pilgrimage towards Brahman in the transcendency of his non-manifestation. Therefore does the Swami jokingly say: 'Better offer your service to the guru who is living flesh and blood, than to the stone icon or a framed picture of some deity.'[2]

The Swami does not here deride our offering worship at temples. On the contrary, he indicates that the guru is verily the Divine in human form. "To a man with merit, guru appears as Siva Himself. To the sinner he appears to be merely a man," says the Guru Gita. One cannot enjoy the grace of the guru fully if one considers him only as a man. The guru appears at the moment of the darshana of the atman, and is the very light with which the atman shines

[1] Sri Aurobindo — The Mother.
[2] G.I.V., p. 336.

when he is finally discovered. 'The guru is akhanda, undivided'; he is advaita, nondual. When one conceives of him as the Divine, one's true self, one receives not only material benefits but also the Divine Grace and true knowledge. When we affirm our faith in the guru as a Divine manifestation we become fully endowed with his infinite grace. When we serve in a gurukula we are able to realize this truth.

One should, therefore, approach the guru with utmost humility and then prostrating before him with great faith and surrender, serve him assiduously and with love and request him for guidance into the lore of the Brahman. Prostration does not merely signify outward genuflexion. Bhagavan Ramana says, it signifies the subsidence of the ego. Guru Bhakti would help us to do service with humility, destroy our ego and prove to be a constant source of inner-strength.

To obtain his grace the disciple should be the embodiment of service; Like sat sanga and Iswara pranidhana it brings the mind under subjection and helps one to achieve one's objective quickly.[1] Loving service to the guru is very important for attainment of wisdom. Only one who serves the spiritual master, says the Swami, comes to possess the wisdom that is lived and taught by him, just as only he who digs with a spade gets water. There is nothing in this world which cannot be attained with the anugraha or favour of the guru.[2]

To those who had the good fortune of having frequent contact with the Swami, he used to recall his days with his guru, in a voice choked with reverence, piety and great emotion. The Swami used to follow his guru Sri Sivaratna

[1] G.I.V., p. 109.
[2] G.I.V., p. 100.

Giri Swami like his shadow, watching every word he said, watching every movement he made, anticipating his thoughts, his needs, praying, thinking of him all the time.

When some devotees asked the Swami how he would serve his guru when he was doing gurukulavasa, the Swami turned his thought inwards and became silent. After some time he said[1] "Swami would wash the guru's clothes, clean the kamandalu — the water pot; prepare chappathis, food for him, keep the place tidy". And added, "Not like you, idling about, pretending to work. . . Should not one tremble at the very name of the guru?" So saying the Swami farcically dilated his eyes, mimicking anger and laughed heartily, his whole frame rocking in innocent mirth. Then he quietly concluded: "To act according to the guru's will is guru seva; one must offer all that one has to the guru and receive from him what he gives."

A man who has renounced wordly life and has adopted monastic life is, it is said, a million times superior to a dutiful householder. A man who has achieved total renunciation is a billion times superior to one who has merely renounced the world. But infinitely superior is a true sannyasin who has made a deep study of the sastras in order to renounce all that is negative, has become one with the Divine, overcome the twin evils of birth and death, and has attained 'manonasa' or extinction of the mind. Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami was such at rue sannyasin and a great saint.

Guru Bhakti arises out of the psychic communion existing between the disciple and the guru in the disciple's heart. The Swami, himself a great saint, sage and yogi, venerated his guru Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami in utter humility. On Chithra Pournami, the day of his guru's samadhi, he would completely withdraw and observe a

1 G.I.V., p. 340.

total fast. His veneration for his guru was beyond compare. On one such Chithra Pournami day he said: "He (Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami) was like a grand old banyan tree offering refuge to innumerable birds (sadhus) for a long time. It was through the Divine Will that one of the seeds of this tree was carried to Tapovanam.[1]

Such was Swami's humility and guru bhakti.

Residing with one's Master is therefore essential. The abode of sages gets surcharged in an extraordinary way and soon becomes a holy place — a punya tirtha. Vivekananda says: "The presence of those who love God makes a place holy; such is the glory of the children of God and when they speak, their words are scripture. The place where they have been becomes filled with holy vibrations and those who go there feel them and they also become holy."

Sri Desika, in his Adhikara Sangraha, reminds us of the truth that the Lord Himself and all that is great, holy and auspicious come and reside in the midst of the acharyas. The sage Narada, whose mother was a servant woman, attained divine freedom only through his association with and service to saints. We have hundreds of examples where even those born wicked had been converted by their association with saints. Srimad Bhagavata reminds us: "Your heart will not be able to touch the blessed feet of God which kill all earthly desires, till you purify it by the dust of the sages' feet."[2]

"The pollen like dust of the lotus feet of the preceptor" sings Tulasidas, "is a lovely powder of the life-giving herb, which allays the host of all attendant ills of mundane existence. It adorns the body of a lucky person even as white ashes adorn the person of Lord Shiva and brings

1 G.I.V., p. 102.

2 Srimad Bhagavata — skanda VII Ch. 14.4.

forth sweet blessings and joys. It rubs the dust off the beautiful mirror in the shape of the devotee's heart; when applied to the forehead in the form of a Tilak it attracts a host of virtues. The splendour of gems in the form of nails on the feet of the blessed unfolds divine vision in the heart by its very thought. The lustre disperses the shades of infatuation. Highly blessed is he in whose bosom it shines — with its very appearance the bright eyes of the mind get opened, the attendant evils and sufferings of the night of mundane existence disappear".

The grace of the guru is an indispensable condition of spiritual advancement and liberation. "The guru is the spiritual father" says the Swami. "Through the knowledge that he imparts to his pupil, the disciple becomes one with the Brahman and realizes that he is deathless and permanent."

What does the Guru do to the disciple and how does he do it?

"The guru will chiefly help him to perform true prayer. He will undoubtedly not reveal to him at the beginning the heights of advaitic experience. For the unprepared man this could be a dangerous poison like the best medicine taken at a wrong time. As long as the man has a strong sense of ahankara, ego, God is necessarily another for him and advaita merely conceived intellectually (and not experienced directly) leads often to ruin enhancing a man's self-conceit. The guru will first teach the disciple how to make his mind silent by withdrawing from objects of senses and imagination (pratyahara), by fixing his attention on one single point (dharana, ekagrata) and by repeating constantly the name of God (nama japa). Only then, when the disciple is free enough from desires and self-concern and knows already the bliss of inner silence, the guru himself a Brahmanishta (firmly established in Brahman)

will teach him that higher science of Brahman in its very essence, whereby he may know the truth (the eternal purusha) and will lead him immaculate through the doorway of the sun, to where dwells that Purusha beyond death, beyond change."

The desire to be liberated (Mumukshutva) begins with the association with the realized sages. Its nature is the yearning for liberation. Its effect is to stay with one's master. It ends in giving up all study of sastras and performance of religious rites.

The Swami describes how a guru can powerfully influence the disciple. A seed is laid in the heart of the devotee for his spiritual growth. Even as a turtle hatches its eggs merely by looking at them, the mere look of the guru would transform the devotee, however gross his samskaras — latent impressions, might be, to a higher stage of spiritual enfoldment and steadily lead him to spiritual emancipation.[1]

The Swami declares that shraddha does the miracle. His robust and incisive humour sparkles when he observes as an aside: "But it is essential for the guru to have sturdy arms and a strong back; otherwise the disciple's weight may drag him down. . . . and they will both turn somersaults."[2]

Let us note how profoundly meaningful are the images of the disciple's weight and the guru's sturdy arms. The 'weight' may symbolically be the karma of the disciple, the impact of the accretion of various deeds. The sturdy arms point to the power of the guru to liberate the devotee. Obviously a pseudo guru cannot do it (but that is for the guru to worry about!). We may also note here the strange

[1] G.I.V., p. 165.
[2] G.I.V., p. 110.

paradox of a gnani stressing on surrender or the efficacy of surrender in obtaining grace. Did he not himself make it nearly two centuries ago to his own guru?

The guru, we note, dissolves all the weight if the disciple abandons himself. Mark, he will dissolve only the weight and not the prarabda karma itself, for, as the Swami says[1] karma has to be endured, even gnanis have to. But by offering the deeds to the guru, we are able to carry it cheerfully as the weight is made light by his grace. It is said in 'Gnana Inba Veli'[2] how the Swami once took from a female devotee two fruits and told her she could request him to return them to her when she wanted them back. He ate one of the fruits. Soon the lady asked him for the fruits and he gave her the one which was left. She asked for both. Pointing to the fruit in her hand he said: "Look, there is still the other one!" Unable to catch his meaning she begged him to explain. He graciously said: "You have two fruits; the good and the bad deeds. You can give the latter to the Swami and keep the first yourself!"

This is an instance of the guru's compassion at a very high level.

There is a still higher level, perhaps the highest level at which the guru's compassion works. We may again go to the Swami to find out what it is. He explains it to Swami Abhishiktananda in the form of an imaginary colloquy.[3] "Supposing you come to know that there is a swami on the opposite bank of the river, about whom everyone tells wonderful tales. You want to have his darshan at all costs. You set off and come to the river. It cannot be forded and it is too dangerous to swim across. By the bank you see a ferryman with his boat and you ask him to take you across

[1] G.I.V., p. 376–377.
[2] G.I.V., p. 339–340.
[3] Guru and Disciple, p. 126–127.

to the other side. "Very well", he says, "but first of all throw away your bundle. I only take men; not their luggage", "But I cannot leave my bundle behind. How can I do without it? I have food for the journey, blankets for the night, and fruit and flowers to offer to the swami. I have my holy books which I read each day. After all my bundle is not very heavy. Look here, ferryman, be reasonable! Take me over as I am, with what I am carrying. I will pay you for your services." "Do as you like", replies the ferryman, "take it or leave it. I take you across without a bundle or I leave you here with your bundle. Which of the two do you want — the darshan of the swami or your old junk?" So you let go of your bundle, cross the river and have the darshan of the atman."

How simply the Swami has put before us a great truth in his inimitable manner! He has elsewhere said in the traditional language: "Ignorance veils the true Self. Only a sadguru can tear this veil and show the real Self."

That is why the relationship between the guru and the disciple has been hailed as something without a parallel, as being entirely on a supra-human plane. In all the other human relationships, there is some inadequacy, incompleteness, distortion. The union between the guru and the disciple lifts us to 'the plane of original non-duality'.

No wonder Swami Abhishiktananda goes ecstatic when he becomes aware of the unobtrusive charm with which Swami Gnanananda has conquered him. He goes on rapturously: ". . . . .Is it not in fact true that the mystery of the guru is the mystery of the depth of the heart? Is not the experience of being face to face with the guru, that of being face to face with ' one's self' in the most secret corner, with all pretence gone?" He affirms with conviction: "The meeting with the guru is the essential meeting, the decisive turning point in the life of a man. But it is a meeting that

can only take place when one has gone beyond the level of sense and intellect. It happens in the beyond, in the fine point of the soul as the mystics say."[1]

He is right. For does not the Hindu tradition show that spiritual communion transcends language and reason, speech and thought? It is not by discursive knowledge that the guru imparts truth but mostly by a silence which changes the heart, which is eloquent and profound, purifying the disciple in every way and establishing him in Reality. The real guru is he who without the aid of words can help the attentive soul hear the 'Tat Tvam Asi' (Thou art That) of the Vedic Rishis. Therefore does Swami Abhishiktananda justly proclaim it as 'atma bhasha', the language of the soul.[2] And thus the Swami was to his disciples verily the Dakshinamurthy, the eternally young, who by silence revealed the truth.

We learn from Swami Mukundananda Saraswati that the Swami never liked to 'discuss' matters spiritual. It is interesting to note how the Swami categorically says: "One does not discuss the subject of meditation; one immerses oneself in it." He goes on to point out how vain an English lady was, who thought that she could go round the world and exhaust the subject by meeting and discussing it with various seers! It is on the contrary revealed through silence. The transformation is so very delicate and unobtrusive that the seeker himself will be surprised to see the sea-change.

It is thus the outer guru opens to the inner guru. For what the guru says springs from the deepest springs of the heart of the disciple.

The Swami thus points out in no ambiguous terms that

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 29.
[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 30.

surrendering to the guru's feet alone helps one reach the highest state of knowledge. How does he drive the point home? Says the Swami: "Only the udders of a cow yield milk and not its legs. To get water from the ground one must dig a well. Even so, there is only one way to reach the Divine and that is by surrendering to the feet of the guru." The ardour and fervour of mumukshutva as embodied in the surrender to the guru is illustrated by the Swami here.

The Swami would tell his disciples, "Either be in 'bodha' or be amidst work. Whatever may be one's plane however great an advaitin one may be, when one comes to the guru one must revert to the dualistic role. There is no advaita when it comes to the guru.

In the Bhagavad Gita, where gnana is defined (Ch. 13) there is also mentioned acharya upasana. No one, however, can give a better idea of this acharya upasana than the Maharashtrian saint Gnanadeva. Nivrithinatha, his brother, barely two years elder to him, was his guru. But the flights of veneration and reverence that Gnanadeva reaches when he talks of his guru or service to him are truly unimaginable. Says Gnaneswari on acharya upasana: "Now I will tell you of outward service. Reflecting in his heart the disciple says —

'I desire to be myself the whole body of guru's servants. . . .
I wish to become to the guru all the things that he needs for conducting worship. . . .
I will be the shoes he wears, myself putting them on his feet and both the umbrella and the holder of it. . . .
I will serve his personal needs. . . .
I will be the seat he rests on, his garments and ornaments, his sandalwood paste and other articles for use. . . .

I will be his cook, serve him food and myself be the lamp which is waved round him. . . .

I will be all those objects that the loving glance of the teacher rests on. . . .

I will be all the savoury things he may taste and will provide the fragrance that delights his sense of smell. . . .

As long as my body lasts. I will serve him thus and after death I will still long to do so.

I will mix the soil of my body with that earth on which the revered feet of my teacher will tread.'

May we inculcate this bhava in the service of the guru!

The Master *par excellence* that the Swami was, he would reveal himself as a disciple *par excellence* on Chithra Pournami day.

The Swami assures us, "The grace of the guru will surely well up and flow unsought towards those who are truly loving of heart and drench them with his life-giving grace. The parabrahman is all pervading. This parabrahman takes on the form of the guru and helps each one according to his need and potentiality."[1]

He was so totally dedicated to his guru that he would remind one of the famous verses of the Vaishnavite saint, Kulasekhara Alwar:

> 'I don't ask of these, Oh! Master! riches, good fortune, salvation; I seek no happiness, no knowledge. This is my only prayer to Thee; That as the breath of life forsakes me, still I may chant thy holy name and let there be unswerving bhakti at thy lotus feet.'

Highlighting the value of padapuja or worship of the guru's feet, the Swami interprets a popular episode in

[1] G.I.V., p. 338.

Srimad Ramayana as follows: 'Sri Rama did not give his crown to Bharata. Sri Rama thought that more than himself, his sandals were important. So he gave them to Bharata.'

Again the Swami says, "Lord Nataraja too indicates by pointing at his lifted foot that it is enough that one attains his feet"

> *"Nissesamambaratalam yadi patrika syat*
> *Saptarnavi yadi sametya masi bhavitri*
> *Vakta sahasra vadanah purusah svayamcet*
> *Likyeta Rangapatipadukayoh prabhavah"* [1]

Sri Desika, in his magnum opus 'Padukasahasram' in praise of Lord Ranganatha's padukas, says: "Only the Lord of the Purushasukta can write about your (paduka's) prabhava using the sky as the canvas and the seven seas as ink."

In this verse Sri Desika underscores the endless majesty and mystery of the Lord's Paduka which supports the Lord Himself.

> *"Murdhna dadhanam manipaduke tvam*
> *Uttamsitam va purusam bhavatya*
> *Vadanti kecit vayamamanama*
> *Stwameva saksatadhidaivatam nah"* [2]

"Some say that one must praise and glorify you (Oh, Paduka! who supporteth the Lord by carrying Him on your head). Some say one must praise the Lord who wears you on His feet. But we proclaim that you are the sole repository of all our adoration and source of our strength."

[1] Padukasahasram, 32.
[2] Padukasahasram, 99.

Sri Desika, thus, endows the Lord's paduka with a mystic significance. In the Vaishnava tradition, the Lord's padukas are none other than the long line of acharyas commencing from Sri Nammazhvar. The guru padukas signify the unbroken succession of the spiritual masters, their tradition and their perennial sampradaya. It is a subtle symbol of the guru himself; in its gross form it is as it were the guru's grace in a congealed form.

The Swami introduced the Guru Paduka Puja, a traditional form of worship at the ashram to develop guru bhakti and 'seva bhava' in the devotees. In Gita Bhashya, Acharya Sankara says that the right knowledge is unattained by those who have not been properly initiated into the traditional knowledge by the gurus (*Guru sampradaya rahitanam*). Through guru paduka one is not only linking oneself to a particular Master but to the whole parampara of spiritual masters. It has behind it all the sanctity and authority of long established sanctions, vast experience and a store-house of knowledge enriched by so many masters. The Swami, in his avyaja (causeless) karuna (mercy) opened up this royal road to the devotees. The padukas of Sri Sivaratna Giri Swami and Sri Sankara were worshipped whenever the devotees wanted to — be it morning, midday or evening and around this elaborate puja were structured other pujas, songs and hymns. Guru upasana renders the devotee's mind free from impurity, makes it subtle, clear and fit for meditation on the Atman.

To the Swami, padukas by themselves were only symbolic representation of the guru within. To a Visishtadvaitin it would represent Sri Ramanuja, to a Muslim, Mohammed the Prophet, to a Christian, Jesus the Christ. The Swami would advise other religionists also to worship the padukas and while doing so he wanted them to link themselves to their own teachers, more particularly to the

Divine within. When a Christian devotee looked bewildered by the Swami's enthusiastic participation in the puja, the Swami pointed out to him that a gnani alone could do that in the right spirit, rooted as he is in gnana.

The profound adoration, piety and reverence the Swami showed during the Guru Paduka Puja was a supreme experience to witness. On one such occasion he ecstatically danced with the padukas on his head. Invariably the Swami would personally supervise every item of the arrangements for paduka puja, watch intently how the padukas were carried and how they were decorated. He would ensure that the lamps were lit and properly tended and all the upacharas, acts of homage, were done correctly and with deep devotion and that the archana was done with piety. He would rarely sit down at the start and completion of the archana. He would close his eyes and meditate on the guru paduka or the picture of Sankara right opposite to him. Not that such a upasana was necessary for him. He taught his disciples by precept and practice, how important it was to concentrate, to be totally absorbed in the thought of the guru.

When a devotee approached the Swami for permission to perform Navavarana Puja to the Sri Chakra (a mystic diagram for worship of the Divine Mother) the Swami remarked that it was not necessary and that she could as well perform similar puja to the padukas. Such was the high esteem in which he wanted his disciples to hold the padukas. It is not without significance that in the Sri Vidya cult the guru padukas occupy an important place. In the tradition of the Tantra, the guru is the fulcrum on which every movement in spiritual life turns. He is not just a learned man who can teach. Indeed it is profane to look

upon him as human.[1] He is much more, in fact looked upon as the very Divine Himself. "The Supreme Siva who is formless", says the Kularnava Tantra, "appears to the seeker in the form of the guru". "The guru is great because the First Lord, Mahakala, is manifest in him." (Yogini Tantra). In the Tantra Parampara, the transmission of grace (Sakti pata), channelling of the grace through guru puja is essential.

The paduka may be made of wood, silver or gold. What is important is that the padukas are imprinted in the heart of the disciple, nurturing his devotion and leading him to the path of holy tradition of which he is the rightful heir.

The devotion to guru paduka refines the disciple's bhakti to the stage of incandescence by the descent of grace. As in every symbol, what the disciple sees in the paduka depends on the state of his understanding. Gradually the symbol acquires greater and greater depth and meaning. The guru is the symbol of symbols. The puja may start with physical love, with greatest attachment to the physical presence of the guru, but slowly it takes one beyond the body consciousness, ridding one of the bhava roga (diseases of samsara, of birth and death).

Pada puja thus occupied the pride of place in Tapovanam. In the later years, almost no day passed without a specially significant worship of the padukas by the devotees.

Yoga

Like all other great masters, the Swami held the view that with perfect love or bhakti, the true knowledge or gnana is bound to come even unsought. Among the means

[1] M. P. Pandit — Ch. on 'The Guru Sishya Tradition' in "Studies in the Vedas and the Tantra".

essential for liberation, bhakti is the greatest. The best equipment for an aspirant will be a harmonious blending of gnana, bhakti and yoga. "Three things are necessary for a bird to fly — the two wings and the tail as a rudder for steering, gnana or knowledge is the one wing, bhakti or love is the other, and yoga is the tail that keeps the balance."[1]

Cultivating ananyabhakti for the guru as for the divine, the sadhaka should approach humbly the guru who is a great yogin himself and has peerless knowledge and experience. It is beyond doubt that the Swami practised to perfection all the known disciplines aiding self-realization. He was himself a perfect Yogin. It is, however, significant that he became an adept in every path he chose to tread. This again goes to prove the primacy of the goal over the path.

He was a perfect Hata yogi. This is obvious from the Divine effulgence and ineffable beauty and grace of his physical form. He showed that hata yoga also could ornament the highest spiritual attainment, if only one constantly kept in view the goal, paid unswerving attention to the light within and was armed with the greatest dispassion or desirelessness or vairagya which would not allow one to be lured by the siddhis or super-natural powers that might accrue to him on the way. "Hata yoga", as Sri M. P. Pandit succinctly puts it,[2] "offers the means for increasing control over the body—vital force relationship—promoting in the process the power to transcend the limits of time and space". He goes on to say: "Longevity is a natural result

[1] Swami Vivekanananda — Bhakti Yoga — eleventh ed., p. 6.

[2] The Hindu — 25-7-1976. Sri Pandit ends up his article by pointing to the limitations of hata yoga and stresses the need for developing it beyond its present planes of use and value.

of the proper utilization, without wastage, of the life-force." Swami Gnanananda knew its finest and subtlest points. A devotee has recorded how the Swami would sit for meditation in padmasana on the surface of water in a well.[1] He lived to a phenomenal age through perfect control of his physical and vital forces.

It is beyond doubt that he could cure the illness of his devotees partly through his yogic powers. Many devotees vouchsafe to the astonishing fact as to how he had taken over their ailments and worked them out in his body, as a vicarious atonement.

The Swami radiated health and transmitted it to others. Swami Vivekananda says, "The pure man, who has controlled the pranas, has the power of bringing it into a certain state of vibration, which can be conveyed to others, arousing in them a similar vibration". In the presence of the Swami, the disequilibrium in a sick devotee got corrected and he was restored to good health.

More often, it was not the deliberate exercise of yogic will on the part of the Swami but God's mercy flowing freely through him, a Jivanmukta, whose mind was stripped of all ego-consciousness and had become one with the Cosmic Mind, that brought about miraculous cures. With one deep look of compassion from the eyes of that desireless one, the Atmakama and Aptakama, the realized soul to whom all objects of desire are in Self and hence have been attained, with the slightest sympathetic movement in his mind which was devoid of all volition, extraordinary cures took place in his mere presence.

[1] Kavi Yogi Suddhananda Bharati records in his account of the Swami's life, how when he used to float on the water in a tank in Tiruvannamalai, Swami Gnanananda who also happened to be there at that time used to remark to him, "Float on the water of God-consciousness!" Even from this casual remark the Swami's attitude towards hata yoga becomes clear.

It is a well-known practice in India that through control of prana one could work wonders. "He who has grasped the prana has grapsed all the forces of the universe, mental or physical. He who has controlled the prana has controlled his own mind and all the minds that exist. He who has controlled prana has controlled his body and the bodies that exist, because the prana is the generalised manifestation of force."[1]

The Swami knew hata yoga so thoroughly that he could dispel the doubts and clear difficulties that troubled any sadhaka of that yoga. But it is very significant that he never attached any importance to it merely as a means of acquiring physical prowess. In fact he would say that there is no connection between longevity and self-realization.[2] To many a curious listener who was only interested in the physical aspects of hata yoga, he did not choose to unravel its intricacies. On the other hand, if any genuine spiritual seeker had any doubt, he did not hesitate to help him. A devotee has observed how the Swami used to point out the strictly limited value that hata yoga (as commonly understood) and other physical exercises have. The Swami emphasized the need for culturing the 'subtle body' and he used the elements of hata yoga only as a progressive means to achieving that end.[3]

[1] Swami Vivekananda: Raja Yoga (Ch. II).

[2] G.I.V., p. 208.

[3] Again to go to Sri M. P. Pandit: (Referring to asanas and pranayama) "they tend to become ends in themselves. Also beyond a limit, they do not help in the development of the being, refinement of emotions and revelation of the soul. They can't liberate the mind from its limitations, from subjection to ignorance. They ensure increased vitality, sound health, control over disease, but little more. They can prepare a solid base in the body, a fine dynamism of life. But much remains to be done, especia lly in the purification and liberation of the mind."

The Swami is believed to have mastered 'Navakhanda yoga' as well. That is, he could separate various limbs of his body and reassemble them. Sadasiva Brahmendra of Nerur, the great Master, was also an adept in this discipline. As an Avadhuta, clad in space, he was passing through a Muslim locality. As his God-intoxicated condition was not known to the villagers, one of them cut off his hand as a punishment for walking nude in front of women. Sadasiva walked along as if nothing had happened. The assailant at once realizing that he was a great yogi, fell at his feet and begged his pardon. The compassionate Sadasiva smiled gently and just held the severed hand in its original place. To the suprise of all, it stuck and the arm assumed the original shape! It is said that this is possible for a person who has attained 'bhutajaya' or control over the elements. There is a fascinating account of the Swami having performed this yoga.

At Siddhalingamadam, the Swami was often found to get up from his bed at dead of night and go out of the ashram. Devotees believed that he was going to a Kali temple at the outskirts of the village for his midnight meditation. Therefore, none dared disturb him there. Ranganathan, a personal attendant of the Swami was however overtaken by curiosity one night to know where the Swami went at such an odd hour. Ranganathan stealthily went to the temple where the Swami had gone earlier. There he was struck with horror when he saw a gruesome, blood-curdling sight. The Swami's head, hands and legs lay separated from the trunk of his body. He got terribly frightened and ran back to the ashram trembling with fear. The next morning the Swami made enquiries of Ranganathan about his nocturnal expedition. Ranganathan who had still not got over his fright could only narrate in broken sentences, what he had witnessed. Swami sternly rebuked

him and warned him not to indulge in such adventures as he might die out of sheer fright at such a sight. The Swami himself seems to have referred to his mastery in Khandayoga.[1]

The Swami was also an adept in Kundalini Yoga and had mastered various methods of awakening the coiled power, but he seldom encouraged questions about it when they were posed by lay devotees out of curiosity. In fact, he used to reply them with asperity. But his casual conversation abounded in references to that discipline.[2]

Hata yoga,[3] aiming at the complete conquest of the body, develops mastery over the rhythm between the physical body and life energies that sustain it. After acquiring control over the functioning of the vital forces, the pranic energies can be directed wherever required or desired. When thus the imbalances are corrected and deficiencies made up, the nervous system, which is fortified ensuring robust vital health, is now rendered capable of supporting increasingly greater pressure of vitalising forces without spilling them. By proper direction of the life breath and exertion of its pressure, the power which is lying dormant in man is awakened. The six centres of subtler energies which are normally inactive or only partially open

[1] A lady devotee whom the Swami brought up as a child when he was in Siddhalingamadam, has given a very interesting account on this point. The Swami told her when she was a child, in his characteristic impersonal manner, that before he became a popular sannyasin he used to wander on the river bank nearby. He added: "If anyone had chanced to see me he would have been horrified." "Why, why should be he horrified?" asked the innocent child. "Swami would be peacefully lying, dismembering itself!" A chill creeps into her being. Swami goes on: "Then on its own it would get up and go. That is a kind of yoga." "Why should you do like that, Swami?" asked the girl, terror stricken. The Swami had lapsed into silence.

[2] G.I.V., p. 143, 441.

[3] Abstracted from an article by Sri M. P. Pandit.

are now forced open. As each of these centres is set free into activity, there is a corresponding enlargement of consciousness and range of action at that level of the being. When the ascending power reaches the highest centre at the brain, his consciousness is liberated into a state of bliss that is unbroken and divine. The yogi is freed from the holds of outer nature as the latent power is fully functioning.

Thus, hata yoga is not a means for merely culturing the physical body. It is a tapasya or austerity which is control, mastery, full utilization and concentration of all energies, leading to enlightened spiritual orientation and heightening of physical consciousness. A life of balance and equanimity results as nerves of steel are developed which preserve calmness and strength in the face of odds. The system is not corroded by illness as this is cured by an inner harmony and resilience. The disorganised movements and postures of the body gradually yield place to conscious and willed movements. The body is not allowed to become a slave to habits. A chaotic nature is no longer allowed to run riot, obscuring the light within. The consciousness is maintained at the highest attained level and it governs all the movements of the body which become its expressions. When the body thus becomes an instrument of the Higher Will, ever conscious and readily responsive to the Divine touches within, it assumes a symmetry of proportion and acquires a divine beauty and harmony in form and in activity, as the Divine consciousness peeps out through every pore of it.

Sadguru Gnanananda who lived to a phenomenally long and undetermined age, was indeed a master of such hata yoga.

The Swami had acquired a rare mastery over all aspects and types of 'pranayama' (control of breath). In his small work 'Jiva, Iswara, Jagat', the Swami points out the relationship of pranayama to longevity: "Mind and prana

arise from the same source and hence they function together. When one of them is controlled, the other gets controlled automatically. Therefore when the mind gets quiescent through dhyana yoga or meditation, the incoming and outgoing breaths are also slowed down. When the mind and prana are quietened together in this manner, life energies are conserved. Gnanis who are adepts at such control through dhyana yoga or meditation can attain longevity."

The Swami's very appearance bore an eloquent testimony to this. He always looked fresh as a flower in bloom. He used to prescribe to the competent aspirant the exercise of watching the breath, a practice so vividly described by the Lord Buddha in Satipatthana sutta. He used to say frequently, echoing Yoga Vasishta, "The root of the mind and the root of the prana are the same; controlling one, one could control the other".

"Control of breath means merely watching with the mind the flow of breath. Through such constant watching 'kumbhaka' or retention of breath does come about. For those unable to achieve 'kumbhaka' this way, the method of hata yoga is prescribed."[1]

Watching the breath this way results in a growing sense of calmness and tranquillity and helps attainment of insight. The aspirant ceases to be the body's slave and no longer identifies himself with the ego.

Thus, not only did the Swami prescribe external aids but suggested concentration. 'Concentration within' was always his watchword. Although a great authority on hata yoga and pranayama, he seldom recommended these practices. His most frequent suggestion was watching the breath

[1] Ramana Gita — p. 23.

with constant 'ajapa' of "Soham"[1] — synchronising 'Sa' with the outgoing breath and 'ham' or 'Aham' with the incoming breath.[2] Upasana of Soham is an inspired teaching of the Swami. The non-difference of Brahman and Atman will be known in experience to one who repeats the mantra Soham, Hamsa, with the Ota Prota bhavana, i.e. cross-weaving the mantra as 'He is I'; 'I am He'. This japa can be done anywhere, any time, says the Swami quoting further a Hindi verse:

"Ham aksharse swas utavo;
So ja jake bithavo Re"

'With *ham* take in the breath, with *so* go, sit down in that wakeful sleep, the objectless awareness.'

The Swami would ask the devotees to sing the song "Soham, Soham Bolre Maina". Listen to this attentively, he would say and quote the Telugu verse:

"Hamsa Panchaksharala Mantram,
Paramahamsaluke japa sutram,
Hamsohamani arula vakyam,
Hamsohamanunadi Siva Jiva aikyam."

[1] G.I.V., p. 435–438.
In Upadesa Saram, Bhagavan Ramana says: "The lofty attitude of 'He is I' is preferable to the attitude 'He is not I'. The Sanskrit 'Soham' means 'He is I'. Soham is a key mantra for meditation for an advaitin." (p. 35–36)

[2] Even as a ball thrown by the forearm goes onwards even so the Jiva impelled by the Prana and Apana, does not rest..... With the sound of 'Ha' it goes out and with the sound of 'Sa' it enters again. The Jiva ever utters this Mantra, viz. 'Hamsa, Hamsa' — Thus.... He who knows this is the real knower of Yoga. (In the case of yogins) on account of the precept of the Guru and during susumna (Yoga) the Japa (Prayer) will become reversed. That which becomes thus; viz., "So'ham, So'ham" is known as the Mantra-Yoga."
— Yoga Sikhopanishad.

Watching the breath with meditation on the content of 'Soham' helps the aspirant to steadily reflect on the identity of Amtan and Brahman, indicated by the Tatvamasi Mahavakya. "The same japa", says Swami, "can be done using the mantra 'Rama'. 'Ra' represents Paramatman, 'Ma' represents Jivatma. When the unity of the inner atman and the Paramatman is realized, one can be 'Atma Rama'.

Thus the exercise which starts with the purpose of developing mental concentration, moves on to Nirguna upasana (the worship of the attributeless Brahman). It endows the mind with purity, clearness and subtlety similar to that of atman, when the aspirant qualifies himself for gnanamarga or devotion to knowledge. Thus Nirguna upasana slides into Nidhidyasana or philosophical contemplation which culminates in the direct intuition of the atman.

The Swami often quoted the verses from the Gita which emphasize unbroken patient practice.

> "Little by little, let him withdraw, by reason (buddhi) held in firmness; keeping the mind established in the Self; let him not think of anything. Arresting the fleeting and unsteady mind from wherever it may wander, he should bring it under control of the Atman alone."[1]

Nirguna upasana of 'Soham' thus leads to 'dhyana' or meditation.

Not only his training in Kashmir, but also his travels in Burma and Sri Lanka and his interest in the Buddhist practices made Swami Gnanananda a great Raja Yogi. Raja yoga concerns itself with the close relationship bet-

[1] B.G. Ch. VI — 25.26.

ween the centres of consciousness and psychological reactions and thus provides the invaluable tool of a discipline by which purification of the cyclic prana or the vital is effected. Perfect mastery is acquired by the aspirant who harnesses it for his spiritual sadhana.

The Swami defines 'dhyana' as the cessation of the activity of the mind and restraining the fluctuations of the mind and holding it.[1] He compares the mind to a vessel and the thoughts to the oil it contains.[2] Even as we carefully hold the vessel without spilling the oil, dhyana helps containing the thoughts from wandering. The Swami thinks of a homely analogy[3] to describe the habitual mastery that a sadhaka will attain over his mind by repeated efforts. When a cow tries to run away, we draw it back and tie it in the shed. In due course it becomes so docile that it voluntarily comes and stands near the peg to be tied. So it is with the mind; when at set hours we train the mind to concentrate on a chosen object, gradually on its own the mind allows itself to be harnessed.

The Swami marks 'dhyana' or silent meditation within as the only effective way of achieving the end of this yoga. He calls it the 'royal' road to realization.[4]

What does one contemplate? The Swami quotes often, as a reply, a Tamil verse.[5] The verse asks the mind to turn to the place 'where there is nothing, to a deeper layer (to employ a spatial metaphor) where no thought exists, where there is fullness, where nothing is seen, it is there that one has the vision of the Being'. When a disciple is eager to

[1] G.I.V., p. 431.
Patanjali Yoga Sutra — I.1; III.1.
[2] G.I.V., p. 433.
[3] G.I.V., p. 108.
[4] Guru and Disciple, p. 87.
[5] Guru and Disciple, p. 87–88.

label it equating it with 'void' or 'sunya', the Swami pertinently and penetratingly asks why should one be anxious to give a name to that which has no name. One must see beyond all name and form, beyond 'nama and rupa'.

What should be the nature of this 'dhyana'? It must be a singleminded pursuit of truth, no half-hearted attempt, but a thorough self-offering and concentration, withdrawing from all involvement, going deep within, discovering the very source of thought. At the end of this pursuit one realizes that the pursuer, the pursuit and the pursued are all one.

The Swami told a devotee[1] who had heard the call of his Self, but had not found his way, that he must cease dissipating his energy in futile search and get down to dhyana. In a talk on Chithra Pournami Day (in the year 1958)[2] at Tapovanam, the Swami said: "If a man wanting to go to Tirukkoilur asks different people for the way, each one would point to a different route. He would try each route a little and give up his attempt and become restless. In the end he would never reach Tirukkoilur." So he tells us that to achieve the goal one must have one road (and that is through knowledge, contemplation) and one guru.

He emphatically declares to Swami Abhishiktananda,[3] "Dhyana alone matters. When the call of the within, the call of the real makes itself heard, then every moment should be reserved for the practice of meditation. Once one has found complete inner stability, one can return to a daily contact with the world without any risk". He also points to the well-known analogy of the mind as an ocean

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 84.
[2] G.I.V., p. 99.
[3] Guru and Disciple, p. 95.

and its incessant movement the waves and asks us to still the waves. When the water is absolutely still and crystal clear, we see the bottom where the coin is lying — the atman.[1]

Like all great saints, Swami Gnanananda held the view that perfect love or bhakti is possible only for a man of true knowledge or gnana. In his inimitable simple way he defines 'Bhakti' as a clinging, a clinging on to the Infinite and the Incomparable, a clinging on to That which is itself unattached.[2] The bhakta, the Swami would say echoing the scriptures, is one who keeps meditating on God with the deathless love which the ignorant have for the fleeting objects of the senses.[3]

The Swami demonstrated in his long and multifaceted life that true karma yoga is impossible without gnana and that true bhakti (ahaituka bhakti) is again impossible without gnana and the state of gnana is itself the egoless state.[4] After all, is it not the true message of the Gita? When one fully realizes the Self within, impelled by that consciousness one can do the work, without arrogating to oneself the fruit of one's action and offer bhakti absolutely without bargaining. It is not as though action or love is ruled out where gnana is. Indeed, the keynote of the daily activity of Tapovanam is the simplest — that of singing hymns, namasankirtanam or singing the sacred names of the Lord, dwelling on His beauty and majesty. One was often so overwhelmed by the surge of devotion at Tapovanam with the Swami participating that one momentarily forgot

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 92.
[2] G.I.V., p. 346.
[3] Devotion is indeed the best amongst all means leading to liberation. (Vivekachudamani, Verse 31)
[4] G.I.V., p. 258

that the Swami was a Brahmagnani and was beyond all this singing. Verily he tells Swami Abhishiktananda[1] that of all the four kinds of bhakti, the gnani's alone is the truest bhakti. He no longer prays or asks for anything from God, not even God Himself. He alone can be the perfect bhakta.

Thus, when a Christian onlooker, Father A. M. Arokiasamy, puzzled by the Swami's enthusiastic and exultant participation in the puja, asked how an advaitic gnani could do such a thing, the Swami answered with zest: "Only a gnani could do such things!" For he is truly free, and he alone can participate in all kinds of activity. The Swami goes on to give a concrete analogy to explain the relationship between the three modes. "Cotton may be likened to all pervading advaitic gnana the thread to karma and the colours and patterns in the fabric to bhakti. A gnani should be able to combine all because he is rooted in gnana."

But how are we to attain to that state of perfect bhakti? The Swami would say that we must begin at the beginning.[2] Bhakti in the beginning is motivated — kamya bhakti. In course of time it gets transformed into unmotivated bhakti or 'nishkamya bhakti'. One in a thousand of those who attain the latter will, says the Swami, reach the stage of 'para bhakti' (which we saw earlier).

The Swami laid great emphasis on karma yoga and saguna upasana. He points out[3] that karma yoga,

[1] Guru and Disciple, p. 110 — This exposition of the Swami recalls to us the following verse of the Gita

"Four kinds of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna — the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth and the gnani, the wise man. Of them, the gnani, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels; for excessively dear am I to the gnani and he is dear to me." (Ch. VII — verses 16–17)
[2] G.I.V., p. 352–353.
[3] G.I.V., p. 267.

performing action without desire for results, nishkamya karma — abandoning attachments, remaining unconcerned about success or failure, gives 'chitta suddhi' or purity of mind. 'Saguna upasana' — worship of God — gives single pointed concentration.[1] For bhakti to spring up, the mind should be stirred into melting like the solid lac coming into contact with fire. "Then" says Madhusudhana Saraswati, "the melted mind takes the form of Bhagavan Himself." Bhakti floods the aspirant's heart with the divine waters of the ocean of love which is God Himself. And there is no place for little loves.

A bhakta's renunciation is that 'vairagya' or turning away from all that is not God which results from his great 'anurakti' or love of God. The ultimate reach of bhakti is para bhakti, or Supreme Love, when the devotee "stands clinging to Him, knowing Him and seeing Him as immanent in and fully pervading all beings like ghee in milk, fire and heat in wood and oil in sesame.[2] The Swami demonstrated this para bhakti by being a living example of it.

The Swami, it is true, taught 'Atma vichara', Self-inquiry by well-known vedantic methods such as 'pancha kosa viveka',discrimination of the five sheaths covering the Atman, to his disciples. But it is remarkable, as we mentioned earlier, he never forgot or ignored the nature of this relative world (vyavaharika prapancha). To the initiates he would prescribe, as the first step, the mode of nama sankirtana, offering puja and surrendering oneself to the guru. In this context the Swami hails the uniqueness[3] of the Hindu religion which contains within its fold various forms of

[1] G.I.V., p. 268.
[2] The goal of Life.
[3] G.I.V., p. 273.

worship to suit different kinds of people depending on their mental and spiritual potentialities and tendencies for attainment of Self-realization, atmasakshatkara. The Swami points out that self-offering could only begin with worship, prayer and reciting or chanting the mantras. He puts great emphasis on the worship of a 'murti' or a form. That paves the way, as we saw, for the purification of the physical, the vital and the mental and thus gradual evolution to higher and still higher levels of spiritual consciousness. One ought not to stop at the stage of nama sankirtana nor allow it to degenerate into a sentimental emotionalism or into a mere music concert. (This is very significant when seen against the background of the distinct place assigned to singing of songs at Tapovanam). It must gradually lead one to 'manasika puja'[1] or inner worship.

The Swami assures us that the lamp of wisdom (Gnana-deepam) would be lighted up in the heart of the devotee once the devotee totally surrenders to the Divine will. Does not Lord Krishna say, "To these, ever devout, worshipping Me with love, I give that devotion of knowledge by which they come to Me. Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, by the luminous lamp of wisdom"?[2] — "by the lamp of discriminatory knowledge, fed by the oil of pure devotion (bhakti-prasada), fanned by the wind of earnest meditation of Me, furnished with the wick of right intuition, purified by the cultivation of piety, chastity and other virtues, held in the antah-karana which is completely detached from all worldly concerns, placed in the wind-sheltered enclosure of the mind which is

[1] G.I.V., p. 353–354.
[2] Gita (Ch. X, verse 11).

withdrawn from the sense objects and untainted by attachment and aversion, and shining with the light of right knowledge generated by incessant practice of concentration and meditation."[1] The Swami points out that manasika puja is more important than 'bhahya puja' or external worship, as the former is closest to 'atma vichara'.[2]

Discussing manasika puja, the Swami drives home the point by an intimate and personal account of Poosala Nayanar.[3] He was a poor devotee of the Lord. Knowing his intense desire to build a temple, Lord Siva appeared in his dream and said, "Build your temple in your own mind". The Nayanar considered this to be a divine command. For three years he was totally absorbed in his mind on 'building' this temple, brick by brick. He mentally erected the dwajasthamba, installed the Nandi, built the moola mandapa, garbhagraha, the ardhamantapa, the tank and the gopuram. The king of the country, who had just then finished a magnificent temple of Lord Siva, wanted to perform the kumbhabhishekam for the temple he had built. He chose an auspicious day, which was the day the poor Nayanar too had chosen for the kumbhabhishekam of his 'temple'. The king prayed to the Lord Siva to attend the function. The latter told him: "You must have your function some other day, as I have to attend the kumbhabhishekam being celebrated by a devotee who is dear to me." The king wondered who this devotee could be that had built a temple more pleasing to Lord Siva

[1] Shankara's commentary on the above verse — Translation of A. Mahadeva Sastri.

[2] Vivekachudamani describes Bhakti as follows: "Among the set of means to bring about moksha, bhakti is the greatest. Continuous contemplation of one's essential nature (swarupa) is said to be bhakti." (verse 32)

[3] G.I.V., p. 357.

than his own. He finally realized that it was the intensity of single-minded devotion that mattered to the Lord, and not ostentatious marks of worship.

The Swami took great delight in narrating the stories of Maharashtrian saints like Namdev, Gnanadev, Chokka, Ekanath, Thukkaram and Gora, to emphasize the glory of bhakti. He used to recount the story of Gora, the potter, how he was so filled with devotion that once, while dancing in joy with namasmarana, he did not even realize that he had trampled down his own child in the clay which he was softening under his feet. Through the Lord's grace the child was finally saved. It is said of Chokka who died along with some others when a wall collapsed his devotees wanted to bring his bones to Pandharpur. In vain did they search for them. They approached Namdev for advice. "Pick up only those bones from which is audible the name of Vittala", said Namdev. Thus were the bones of Chokka identified.

The Swami would also relate a number of episodes from the lives of Alwars, Nayanmars, Arunagirinathar, Avvaiyar, Ramadas, Kabir and Meera. Swami would narrate with tears in his eyes, an episode in Kabir's life of how to feed the guests who had come to the house of Kabir, the Lord Rama himself along with Lakshmana, brought to Kabir's house in his absence, wheat flour.[1]

It is not as though the Swami led the lay disciples alone in the path of bhakti. It was part of the discipline for his monastic disciples too. One of the senior disciples of Sivananda, who was taken over by the Swami, writes[2]: "I was a

[1] The Swami's love of Sri Rama was so great that he specially got a mural of Sri Rama Pattabhishekam painted behind the Venugopalaswamy temple.

[2] The Master and the Method, p. 6.

bhakta by temperament and training from boyhood. I was much inspired by a great bhakta who often used to get into Bhava Samadhi. He introduced me to the books 'Lord Gauranga' by Shishir Kumar Ghose, and 'Sri Krishna, the Lord of Love' by Baba Premananda Bharati. When I was ordained as sannyasin by His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati Maharaj of Rishikesh, besides giving me Mahavakya Upadesa, He initiated me to Saranagathi mantra also as a preparatory sadhana. In 1957, when I joined our Gurudev at Tapovanam, He advised me to continue the Mantra japa for some more time. After a few years, the Master working within me aroused in me a deep interest in Sankara Vedanta."

Humility is what marks a bhakta. The Swami, a peerless gnani, was also humility personified. In a talk at Ernakulam in the year 1965[1] the Swami, after expounding many a sacred truth, spelt out the duties of a guru as a microcosmic representative of the Lord. The Swami, in all humility, denied all claims to such a sublime role and called himself an illiterate and ignorant person. A striking instance of humility and prayerful attitude is the Swami's characteristic utterance when the Swami's intercession was sought by his devotees, 'Venduvom' — we will pray. As a learned devotee puts it[2]; "He believes only in the miracles wrought by prayer, but with this tremendous difference, namely, that to the halting and weak prayer of the devotee, the immense spiritual energy of a siddha purusha like him is coupled".

The Swami installed in the temple at Tapovanam all the deities belonging to the Hindu pantheon. He had, however, a special love for Vinayaka who is Pranavaakara,

[1] G.I.V., p. 249, 269.

[2] 'A Day at Tapovanam' in Jayanti Souvenir, 1971.

of the form of 'OM'. The Swami himself must have been an upasaka of 'Ganapati' who symbolizes knowledge of the Self and removes all obstacles. Every pada puja at Tapovanam commences with invocation to the Pillaiyar (Tamil name for Vinayaka) under the mango tree. Devotees in need of mental peace and solace were encouraged to perform Ganapati homam.[1] He would refer to the divine command received intuitively from within as "Pillaiyar commanded me to do it . . . . .".

Swami Tapovan Maharaj truly says:[2] "The seeker whose heart is rich in pure love, even if he be a man of realization, he comes to express his devotion to someone of the manifestations of the glory of the Self. He comes to court and feel his oneness with the divine in the forms of Siva, Vishnu, Rama or Krishna. This experience of perfection and the practice of para bhakti makes him the best Teacher of the World and he gets the gratitude of the seekers in all generations. His is the true glory, he alone is the true Teacher — the Prophet."

Swami Gnanananda laid great emphasis on the worship of the Divine Mother, and the place Sri Vidya occupied as a prelude to Brahma Vidya. In all traditions it is the contact with the Mother that opens the way to the Lord. The Swami was fond of recalling Pattinathar's saying[3] which echoes this idea. "Sri Rajarajeswari" he would say, is verily Dakshinamurti and "Pure Consciousness (or 'Chitrupi')." The Swami's love of the Divine Mother seems

[1] The Swami himself performed the kumbhabhishekam of the Pillaiyar Temple at Yanaikkuppam near Cuddalore. He caused special arrangements to be made for the performance of kumbhabhishekam at Tennel and visited this temple subsequently. He was especially fond of Vinayakar Agaval of Avvaiyyar, which expounds Kundalini Yoga.

[2] Glory of Brahma Vidya — p. 20.

[3] G.I.V., p. 135.

to have an unmistakable relationship with his essentially siddha make up[1]. Many songs on the Divine Mother, like Sankara's devotional hymns, the sage Agastya's which describe the manifestitions of Adi Parasakti, were sung at Tapovanam. The Swami saw the Mother also as Deepa Jyoti (the lighted lamp). It was indeed a magnificent sight to see the procession of Deepa Jyoti at Tapovanam, so memorably described by a devotee.[2] The Swami would request the devotees to salute the deepa. He said, the oil lamp signified Sri Lalitha Parameswari. The Swami's devotion to the Divine Mother reminds one of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The Swami was truly the very embodiment of the Divine Consciousness.

The Swami celebrated Navarathri with great eclat. Vijayadasami was lively, humming with activities and merriment at Tapovanam and the Swami would arrive at the bhajana mandapa, escorted by children gaily decorated as Gods and Goddesses.

There were quite a few occasions when he would accede to the entreaties of devotees to dress himself up as Devi. Devotees would seek the Swami's blessings for marriages by requesting him to don the bridal saree. Even today this tradition is maintained by devotees decorating the Swami's image with the bridal saree.

[1] This is evident from his love of the songs of Siddhas and his own composition of them, his indirect way of revealing truths, use of pun and admiration of other great siddhas, particularly Tirumoolar. This point has been dealt with in Chapter II.

[2] Jayanti Souvenir, 1971. Please see Chapter II.

[3] One of the very close lady devotees was thrilled with the beatific vision of the Swami as the Divine Mother when she looked into his room through the windows. It was truly a vision granted to her by him. While travelling by car, one of the lady devotees asked the Swami to sing. He composed on the spot, a song on the Divine Mother entitled 'Gnana Ponnu', very rich in its esoteric content.

The Swami was a great Mantra Vetta. He was a 'parangata' in Sri Vidya. But he seldom initiated devotees into the mantras. However, it has been recorded that a few of his devotees did have that good fortune. One of them tells us that on expressing a desire to learn Soundaryalahiri, the Swami initiated him and his wife in Sri Vidya, on a Friday. "It is based on 'siddha cult' and dwells more on the unostentatious inward yearning for the 'jyotiswarupa' through the guidelines of Mahavakyas and Hamsa Mantra", the devotee goes on to say. The devotee was more enlightened on the meaning and value of Sri Lalitha Sahasranamam when the Swami told him further: "Is there anything to conceive beyond Pragnanam Brahma?", thereby indicating that it can be enhanced to Mahavakya level and Sri Lalitha is no other but our Atman residing in us. It seems, during Navarathri days the Swami used to prompt the couple to meditate the mantra in the 'ajapa' method which was the Swami's favourite for the evolution and emancipation of the soul through manolaya and manonasa. As a great worshipper of the Mother, the Swami encouraged one of his staunchest devotees, to perform Gayatri Upasana and later, Sri Rajarajeswari upasana[1]. He also instructed him to initiate in his presence one of his most prominent disciples into Sri Vidya.

On the other hand, when a lady devotee asked for permission to do Sri Chakra puja, the Swami told her that there was no need for separate worship of Sri Chakra and asked her to continue to perform navavarana puja to the guru's feet. But there is no doubt that he conceded an important place to mantra yoga in the higher preparatory

[1] GIV. p. 464. This devotee was asked to drop all upasana and take to Self-enquiry when he was initiated to sannyasa.

discipline. After upasana is perfected,the sadhaka enters upon 'vichara' or inquiry.

The Swami insisted on every devotee adhering to the 'sampradaya' or tradition in which he was born and brought up. For instance, he told a Vaishnavite devotee to learn and perfect sandhya vandana, offer of prayer at dawn, noon and dusk. It is interesting how he indicated to this devotee that he must first adhere to his swabhava and swadharma. The devotee tells us with gratitude how he learnt the truth from the Swami. It appears he kept on asking the Swami to initiate him to some mantra. For some reason the Swami kept on ignoring his request. However, after sometime he specified a particular day and said he would initiate him. The latter was immensely pleased. In the meanwhile, someone brought a journal and offered it to the Swami. Without even looking at it, the Swami passed it on to the devotee. The appointed day came. The devotee was waiting with intense joy. After the usual routine at the ashram, the Swami got up and withdrew to his room much to the disappointment of the devotee. Suddenly, the Swami turned towards him and said "We will perform Sandhya vandana and then meet". The devotee was terribly unnerved and ashamed, for he had forgotten the practice of Sandhya vandana. And to whom could he go and learn this at such a short notice? With deep depression he fingered the pages of the journal the Swami had given him. Lo! Except an article in it on the value and krama of Sandhya vandana nothing else made any sense to him. With deep gratitude he realized how kind the Swami was and how subtly he had taught him the truth.

The Swami initiated some devotees in the Gayatri Mantra. He would say that the Gayatri Mantra was

sufficient to reach the ultimate in spiritual sadhana.[1]

Training

The Swami gave rigorous training to aspirants so that they may be fit not only for upasana but also for the higher reaches of Self-realization. The Swami was a Gunatita and he wanted his devotees to endeavour to be so. He would repeatedly stress the necessity to conquer tamas and rajas, and cultivate sattva and then go beyond it to attain the objective of being a Gunatita, one who has transcended the three constituents which underlie nature, all manifestation. "If the gunas are to be effectively and permanently resisted and overcome", says the Narayaneeyam, "the only way is to have devotion characterized by total dedication to Thee, the one who transcends the three Gunas.."[2] "Sattva, rajas and tamas — these are the modes of Prakriti (Nature) and not of the Self. By (developing) the quality of sattva (therefore) one should control (the operation of) the other two (viz. rajas and tamas) and (then) sattva itself (in the shape of sattvic virtues like truth

[1] The Gayatri mantra, which is the 10th Rik in the 62nd Sukta of the 3rd mandala of the Rig Veda, attributed to Viswamitra, reads: "We meditate upon that excellent splendour of the Lord Savitr. May he activate our thoughts." The Gayatri is one of the most significant verses in the Hindu hymnal scriptures. It is the only mantra which remains unchanged in all the four Vedas.

[2] "Examine what are the virtues most necessary for you, those most difficult to acquire, the sins into which you frequently fall and the most usual and unavoidable occasions of your fall. In the time of struggle, you should have recourse to God with entire confidence and remain firm in the presence of His Divine Majesty. You ought to adore Him humbly, declare to Him your misery and weakness and lovingly beg the aid of His Grace." (Brother Lawrence).

and compassion) by sattva (in the form of quietism)" says the Lord.[1]

Bondage is due to the self-oblivious identification with gunas, the modes of Nature, and with the ego bounded knot of action, of the mind, life and body. To rise above the gunas and be a Trigunatita is to become conscious of one's real and true nature, Purushottama. This transcendence of the three gunas is 'Sadharmya'.[2]

The whole qualitative action of nature, so infinitely intricate in its detail and variety, is cast in the mould of the three general modes of gunas, everywhere presented, intertwined and almost inextricable — sattva, rajas and tamas. They are seen in the motion of the Universal Energy as Nature's three inseparable powers of equilibrium, kinesis and inertia. They are symbolized in the Hindu Trinity as the Preserver Vishnu, Creator Brahma and Destroyer Rudra, respectively.

The three gunas are present in various degrees in all objects gross or subtle, including the mind, the buddhi and the ego. The food which nourishes our body, the thought which is the function of the mind, the duty which elevates a man from the animal level, charity, worship, sacrifice, in short everything belonging to the Universe of Maya, contains these three gunas. They constitute the three strands of the rope of Maya, the rope by which Maya binds man to the illusory world. These gunas, born of Prakriti bind fast in the body 'the Embodied, the Indestructible'.

The essence of tamas is aprakasa or ignorance and apravritti. Tamas brings incapacity and negligence of

[1] Bhagavata (Sk. XI. Ch. 13)

[2] This and the following passages are abstracted from Introduction to Atmabodha by Nikhilananda and Essays on Gita of Sri Aurobindo.

action, error, inattention and nonunderstanding. Indolence, languor and sleep belong to it. It obscures knowledge and causes all confusion and delusion. As the Swami points out[1], a person overcome by tamas will indulge (like a beast) in cruelty towards creatures, drinks, covetousness, lying, evil company, lethargy, sleep, over-eating, ire, a taste for putrefied, unwholesome food etc.

Its opposite is rajas which is pravritti. Rajas is the child of the attachment of the embodied soul to the desire for objects. Born of Nature's thirst for an unpossessed satisfaction, it is full of unrest, fever, greed and excitement. Its fruit is lust for action, bringing with it grief, pain and suffering. The Swami has his own picturesque and homely way of describing it.[2] He who is rajasic will have a tendency to be carried away by the phenomenal appearances. Like a kite blown by wind, such a man will allow his mind to be tossed by desire, not knowing what is peace.

The essence of sattva is prakasa or enlightenment. In sattvic pleasure, the soul is possessed of itself in light and there is a truthful adjustment between the regarding Soul and the surrounding Nature with the objects of desire and perception. The Swami enumerates the characteristics of a sattvic man thus.[3] He will strive to realize the object of existence — that is the worship of the Divine. In the full realization that karma is God ordained, he would act without any attachment, internal or external; he will look upon this created world as God's play. He will be enlightened by devotion to the Divine and men of God, dhyana of the Divine, food that is dear to the sattvic, love of good

[1] GIV p. 57

[2] GIV p. 151

[3] GIV p. 156

company, peace, service to guru etc. The Swami laid great emphasis on the need to cultivate sattva guna.[1] For, in this state of pure sattva, the other states get weakened and the mind is cultured for swarupa-nishta, self-enquiry and takes delight in it.

Although from the highest standpoint the sattva ideals of our enlightened will and reason are at best progressive compromises, subject to a constant imperfection and flux of change, they are indispensable for the betterment and raising of personal aspiration and conduct.

The glowing ideal the Swami laid before his devotees by precept and practice, was to be a gunatita, a transcender of gunas. The gunas constitute the triple stair which leads upward towards Divine light but cannot reach it. The means of attaining the liberating knowledge of the heart, is to make use of the gunas as far as possible in climbing the 'ladder of perfection'. The very gunas are deliberately made use of as the means of the moral life whereby the thraldom of the blind Prakriti is partially at least thrown overboard and the way is made safe for one to enter through the doors of devotion to the seat of God.

The Gita says: "(The Vedas treat the triad of the gunas) Be, O Arjuna, free from the triad of the gunas, free from pairs of opposites, free from acquisition and preservation, ever remaining in the sattva (goodness) and self-possessed."[2]

How does one go beyond the gunas? To see that the modes of Nature are the whole agency and cause of our works and to know and turn to That which is beyond all gunas, is the way to rise above the lower nature. He who worships the Lord, the receptacle of the immortal and imperishable Brahman, with the yoga of unswerving

[1] GIV p. 156
[2] Gita. Ch. II. Verse 45

devotion goes beyond the three gunas completely and becomes worthy of being One with the Brahman.

One should totally renounce the poor braggart, trepidant, egoistic condition of consciousness, the crippling narrowness of this little, helpless, separative personality, according to whose view point we ordinarily think and act, feel and respond to external touches. Breaking out of our ego-moulds into the impersonal spirit, we should live in the identity of the one Self in all.

The Swami used to quote a verse of his own, which speaks of total ego annihilation.

"When I reach the depth of Thee,
Oh, what will happen to me?
Oh, what will happen to Thee?
When I reach the depth of me
There is no longer Thee or me."

The idea of oneself must be so completely rooted out that nothing but pure awareness alone remains. As the Swami used to recite—

"There where nothing is,
Everything in fact is.
Penetrate this secret,
And you will vanish from yourself,
Then alone, in truth YOU ARE."

"Such a gunatita", says Jivanmukti Viveka, "is described in the texts from the Smrithis with epithets such as 'Jivanmukta', the liberated in this life," (Laghu Yoga Vasishta, Ramayana Canto 57), the 'stitapragna', one whose mind is entirely steady (Gita — Ch. II, 55–72), 'bhagavad bhakta', one devoted to God (Gita — Ch.XII,

13–19), 'Brahmana', one who has realised Brahman, the truly twice born (Mahabharata XIII. 251), 'Ativarana-srami', one beyond the pale of the four varnas or ashramas (Suta Samhita, Mukti Kanda, Ch.5) and the like.

How does the Swami describe for us the gunatita?[1] "One who is beyond the gunas. Water, when it gets warmed up, we call it hot water; when it is kept in the refrigerator it gets frozen into ice. One cannot separate from water its warmth or coldness, but although they appear differently the condition of water is separate from them. Similarly, while the jiva is subject to the three gunas, the chit remains unchanged. When there is the awareness of one's true nature as Sat Chit Ananda — Existence, Consciousness, Bliss — one could stand apart unaffected by the three gunas, shorn of ego, and watch the activities of the gunas. One realizes that they operate, belonging as they are to the plane of Prakriti; that even when action is being performed, he knows that it is not he who is the doer but it is the gunas which perform action, and he witnesses this action as the embodiment of Sat". Such a one was the Swami and he imparted a rigorous training to his disciples which set them on the path towards this objective.

The training that the Swami gave to his secular disciples was interesting. Once the disciple was reasonably safely anchored in him, the Swami would tackle him as if he were squeezing an orange! Strains and stresses would deliberately come his way. His reactions would be watched. The closer a person came to the Swami the less likely it was that the Swami would show the same degree of hospitality; greater were the chances of the Swami behaving rudely — apparently humiliating and ill-treating him! To be in the presence of the Master is in itself a sadhana.

[1] GIV p. 157-158

The annealing treatment would start. When the test was on, the devotee would start turning his thoughts inwards and looking for the faults within, which had made the Swami 'angry'. He would then try to correct himself so as to come up to the Swami's expectations of him. Then the Swami would cool him down. The devotee would feel happy inwardly. Suddenly the Swami would turn different. May be this time the Swami would be indifferent to him. The heat was again on and the disciple would look more deeply inward. The process of purification and purgation would thus go on. The Swami by then would have made a deep impression on him and he would feel safely rooted in him. The roughing up would be taken with good grace! A certain resilience would be developed when the going was difficult. The psychic contact with the Swami when he forged and hammered the devotee made him pliable and more receptive to true knowledge. The devotee, despite the Swami's seeming indifference, was always aware of his ever enveloping kindness.

The treatment was however fascinatingly different and varied. One of the devotees was a high-placed government official. The Swami used to treat him with great respect; gave due regard for his official position in life. Slowly as the devotee moved into the orbit and considered himself a disciple of the Swami, the latter took over. The high-placed official would find allotted to him some of the worst rooms in the ashram without even the elementary amenities of life. He had to bear it without complaint and in due course developed vairagya. The Swami would not offer any explanation for this treatment. Sometimes, he would be indifferent, sometimes he would find fault and get angry with the disciple without any reason. The devotee being a good aspirant knew he was on probation and should come through creditably. There was an infinite

mercy and compassion in this cruelty. The devotee could see behind the forbidding mask a deeply peaceful face lit up with an ethereal tenderness which poured out from his eyes. The Swami eventually made him one of his finest disciples.

The more the Swami liked a person the greater the hardship he went through and greater the help he received. When the Swami was angry without reason, people knew it was a privilege. He always gave attention to the weaker child, to the weaker aspirant and showed special consideration to those who took particular effort to open up their hearts to receive the shower of his grace.

"A man winnows his neighbour's faults like chaff but hides his own even as a dishonest gambler hides a losing throw", says Dhammapada. The Swami would never countenance any complaints. He would never allow anyone to find fault with others. He would insist that inner cleansing, purification of oneself, is the most important sadhana. He made a deep impression in the devotee's mind that whatever befalls one is by the Will of God and the greatest attribute of God is His justness and fairness.

"It is this knowledge of the Perfect Law", says James Allen, "working through and above all things of the perfect Justice operating and adjusting all human affairs, that enables the good man to love his enemies and to rise above all hatred, resentment and complaining; for he knows that only his own can come to him and that though he be surrounded by his enemies they are but the blind instruments of a faultless retribution."

Whatever prarabdha visits one, it must be gone through in a spirit of true resignation and humility. The Swami would say that slander, calumny and grave disease would descend on a sadhaka to make him learn how to be untainted in his responses to them.

It is the ability to endure suffering without mental reaction, without any imprint on the mind, with the full knowledge that nothing befalls a man which he is not fit to endure, that is important.

Realizing that the Swami would never heed complaints, the inmates of the ashram would bear patiently whatever fell to their lot. When people were unjust or unkind, they endured quietly. This was the spiritual training that the Swami imparted to everyone around him, for this training ultimately spells surrender to the Divine Will.

Absolute dependence on God and belief in His Gopthritva — Rakshishyatiti Mahaviswasah — is the faith one should aspire for. Does not the tendency to complain of suffering show an absence of surrender, a lack of faith in the justice of the Divine, in the Will of God? "Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." (I Peter 5:7).

The Swami would not permit the devotee to indulge in the specious luxury of self-pity or give himself up to anger or make mention of any injustice done to him by others.

The Swami would not also interfere with an uttamadhikari, a high level aspirant, in his suffering although he would show overpowering compassion and mercy.

This absolute saranagathi, surrender, to the Will of the Divine — "Not asking for anything except that Thy will be done" (Kabir) — is the essence of the Swami's teachings. This surrender comes of a total belief in the justice of the Lord.

> "Oh, beloved father, I am in thy hands; .....
> Thou knowest all things and each thing singly and nothing in man's conscience is hidden from Thee.
> Thou knowest things to come before they happen and

Thou needest no man to teach and warn Thee of what is being done on earth.

Thou knowest what is expedient for my progress, and how greatly tribulation serves to scour off the nest of sin."[1]

"Endurance of all afflictions without countering aids and without anxiety or lament is titiksha, forbearance," defines Vivekachudamani.[2]

The circumstances one is placed in are according to the sum total of the force of one's previous thoughts; one must be an akartha, non-doer, an abhokta, non-enjoyer and an asanga, non-attached person. Whatever happens, a spiritual aspirant must recognize in his surrender and devotion that it is for his good, that it is for his development, for the intensification of his bhakti towards Iswara and his Guru who stands as his protecting influence.

He would welcome these experiences as a help in mitigating his vasanas. Patience is a divine quality that is activated when pain and anguish wring the brow.

The Swami, in short, wanted everybody to be self-disciplined and obedient; to cultivate freedom from the fetters of the senses, of actions, freedom from pride, prejudice and distaste.

Special facilities were offered at the ashram for Vanaprasthas, people leading a retired life. The Swami believed that the entire life of a grihasta is a period of sadhana for the final culmination in liberation. In his characteristic style he would say that "living a house-holder's life one must acquire gnana, Knowledge". He however conceded that this was difficult, but could be attained. It is not necessary to go to a forest and away from home to realize the Brahman,

[1] Thomas A. Kempis -- Of the Imitation of Christ Bk. III. Ch. 50
[2] V.V.C. Verse 25.

says Yoga Vasishta. The Swami welcomed with open arms aspirants who had great yearning for liberation, however encumbered they might be with large families.

All life, to the Swami, was Yoga. The duties that fall to the lot of each person should be properly discharged. The Swami did not tolerate neglect of duties, be it the husband or the wife, the child or the mother. When a certain brahmachari, known for his great bhakti, viveka and keen knowledge of the scriptures, approached the Swami for initiation, he said "No, you have responsibilities towards your mother; complete those responsibilities; all shackles will then fall off and the pratibandhas will disappear."

He would however stress that the aspirants' efforts should be single minded. They must have a single goal and should not waste time searching to the right and left. They must not run from master to master. They must stick to one path and start on it. There was no use in feeling all the ripe mangoes on a tree. The man who is really hungry seizes the first good mango he comes across and starts devouring it.

The grihastas in the ashram were required to cultivate dispassion, vairagya and devotion, bhakti, so that on the attainment of fitness they could take to Vedantic sravana. "Through daily efforts and discrimination" says Yoga Vasishta, "the mind becomes purified as a mango ripens".

Reading and gathering information has limited value, like getting at a railway guide. If one wants to reach the destination, one boards a train. Mere study of time tables and maps would not do.

"Stick to the teaching of the Upanishads", he would say, "more particularly to those in which the mahavakyas are embedded. Reality is revealed there". He believed in an in-depth study of Vedanta in a systematic manner, the study being purposive, selective, limited to a few

good books on the subject. For this purpose he would recommend simple manuals of Vedanta, like Vasudeva Mananam, Vedanta Chudamani, Tatvanusandhanam, Kaivalya Navaneetham and Drg Drsya Viveka. Advanced students were instructed to study Sankarabhashya on Prasthana Traya.

Sravana for the lay disciples included singing of devotional hymns which would turn them inward. There is, for example, Sankara's Bhaja Govindam exhorting man to turn away from the ephemeral world. Apart form stotras on Gods and Goddesses, hymns with an accent on guru bhakti like Guru Sthuti, Guru Ashtaka, Guru Paduka Stotra were sung daily. The Purushasuktam used to be recited everyday. A number of Vedantic hymns were a part of the daily prayer. The sonorous verses of "Nirvana Shatkam and Upadesa Panchakam" of Sankara were recited daily for some time. The Swami wanted the truths embedded in them to be recalled and made one's own. No pada puja at the ashram was complete without the chanting of the "Tatvamasi Panchaka." The Swami would sit deeply absorbed with half-closed eyes, as the verses beginning with 'Nistamasi Nirajasi. . . . .' and ending with the words 'Tatvamasi Tatvamasi Rajan' were sung. Again, the Swami laid great emphasis on Brahmagnanavali Mala, another garland of verses of Sankara, starting with the statement 'Asangoham, Asangoham' — unattached am I, unattached am I. He prescribed this for constant recollection and reflection and would even test the disciple whether he was fully grounded in it.

The Swami loved Dakshinamurthy Stotra of Sankara. He would even join the inmates in the recitation. Everyday, come rain or sun, as a daily routine the stotra used to be recited in his presence. On these occasions he was Lord

Dakshinamurthy Himself, seated in regal splendour in the Meditation Hall.

He would often ask the ladies in the ashram to sing in his presence 'Gita Sara Thalattu'[1], a lullaby in the form of questions and answers. It is a small Tamil Vedantic poem purporting to be the essence of Gita. Once, when Satchidananda Swami of Nerur, an erudite scholar visited him at Siddhalingamadam, the Swami requested him to expound these verses to the ashramites.

The other features of the choice of books and hymns are the songs of siddhas like Sivavakyar, Idaikattu Siddhar and Pambatti Siddhar. At Siddhalingamadam he used to ask some of the lady devotees to sing verses from Kudambai Siddhar Padal and it is said he would 'dance' in happiness as they sang: "Vettaveli thannil meiyyenrirupporku pattayamedukkadi?" — "Oh, Kudambai! What are labels and titles to those who have realized the pure consciousness and exist as the only Reality?"

Imparting knowledge of the scripture took various forms in the hands of the Swami. He arranged for classes to be conducted on various Vedantic texts. One day, a disciple approached him in the Meditation Hall and requested him to expound the verse "The process of oblation is Brahman, offered by the sacrificer who is Brahman himself, into that fire which is again the Brahman. By realizing Brahman in every action he reaches Brahman alone".[1] The Swami replied; "A time will come for this, when the Swami would tell you." The disciple went away and a few seconds later, a lady ashramite came up to him and offering him a book said, "The Swami wanted this book to be given to you". It was Ribhu Gita, a book of

[1] See Appendix for a translation of this work.
[2] Gita. Ch. IV. Verse 24.

which the Swami was very fond. The Swami himself came up later in the evening. When the disciple prostrated before him, he said "Ribhu Gita is a treasure. Keep it for study at the stage of Nididhyasana. Right now go through completely the Vedanta Chudamani", and this he said to a brahmachari who could recite the Viveka Chudamani of Sankara by heart!

To the knowledgeable and to those who were far advanced in sadhana, he used to recommend Yoga Vasishta. He requested the late Venkata Subba Iyer, who was noted for his learning, bhakti and for his brilliant exposition of Srimad Ramayana, to take to Yoga Vasishta seriously. Swami Ramathirtha says in his book 'Woods of God Realization': "One of the greatest books and the most wonderful according to me, ever written under the sun, is Yoga Vasishta, which nobody on earth can read without realizing God consciousness." The Swami, whose life and teachings were shining illustrations of the tenets enunciated in Yoga Vasishta, could quote extensively from it. A number of stories, similes, metaphors, welling up in the conversation of the Swami were from this book.

Many splendoured though his conversation was, he said things in such a way that an ineffable communication was established between him and the devotee. Since the voice of the Swami was of one who had come face to face with the actual experience of realization, the ardent devotee would feel the sayings were welling up directly from the most intimate recesses of his own heart.

More frequently, particularly with the monastic disciples and advanced devotees, the communication was beyond words and not through the intermediary of things. It was direct, in depth and at the source of his being — in the state of mouna transcending speech and thought, purifying, transforming and illumining the heart.

The Swami placed a great ideal before his monastic disciples. "Sky thy roof, grass thy bed and food what chance may bring, well-cooked or ill-cooked, judge not" says Swami Vivekananda in his 'Song of Sanyasin'. Swami Gnanananda tells his disciples that the 'Maha Bhogi' or the perfect Enjoyer is he who with patience consumes everything that comes his way like the blazing forest-fire. In his exalted moods, the Swami would sing with Pattinatthar, "Mark! Wandering like a ghost, lying motionless like a corpse, eating the alms like a dog, running hither and thither like a jackal, considering all women as his mother, treating all as his own and with humility, the true gnani will be childlike in his disposition."

Some of the sannyasin disciples were encouraged to take madhukari biksha, the alms collected from a few houses, like the honey gathered by the bee from many flowers. There were days when the Swami would walk up to the devotees' houses, stand at the entrance and call out in his rich stentorian voice "Bhavati bikshandehi" which means 'Gracious lady, serve me alms'. The ladies, who are enjoined by sastras to serve alms to sannyasins, would come running at the Swami's call and stand before him in awe, adoration and wonder, forgetting to do their devoir.

The Swami placed the greatest emphasis on the necessity for the sannyasin to live always in spirit, casting aside matter, offering up his body to parrabdha karma, the karma which is to be worked out in this life, as it is indeed its product. A monk's non-identification with his body should become as natural to him as his non-identification with his dream or shadow body. By the grace of the Sadguru he is helped to get over the 'indecent clinging' to life. The Swami was extremely delighted when his monastic disciples and aspirants showed the greatest dispassion by

not depending on medicines but left things to the course of nature.

He however advised moderation in everything. The golden mean, the middle way, was the rule prescribed by him in the matter of food, sleep, speech or behaviour. He would remind the aspirant: "To him whose food and recreation are moderate, whose exertion in action is moderate, whose sleep and waking are moderate, to him accrues yoga, which is destructive of pain."[1] Severe austerities like fasting or vigils, tormenting the body and mind were disapproved by him. Like the strings of a lute which are not in tune or playable when strung too tight or too slack, but in tune when keyed to the middle pitch, even so efforts when too strenuous lead to flurry, and when too slack to indolence, says the Lord Buddha.

The Swami repeatedly advised his disciples to maintain their mental equipoise under all circumstances by dropping all mental preferences, developing the habit of repose as a witness and of standing apart from the workings of the mind. The life of an aspirant is a constant struggle to transform his entire lower nature. Vasanas, latent tendencies and desires, if merely suppressed will only revive in a recoil. They have to be eliminated by being exposed to the light of Truth and Knowledge. Annihilation of the vasanas is indeed Jivanmukti or liberation, while yet alive. The Swami warned the devotees against the projections of the mind or vikshepa, for mentally shutting out the external world is indeed the stepping-stone for liberation. He would inspire the seeker to renounce all his sankalpas or mental resolves and fancies and become a true sarvasankalpa sannyasin. The Master was very particular that a sannyasin should overcome all his past attitudes and attachments to his relatives, friends and the vocations of his earlier life. By his own example he taught that there was no yesterday nor a tomorrow for a monk. Becoming a sarvaaramba parityagi, renouncing all undertakings one had to live from moment to moment, in the eternal present, accepting everything that flows towards one without any reaction.

[1] Gita. Ch. VI. 17

In essence his method was that of vichara or an inquiry after the preparatory phases of bhakti and yoga. This is beautifully summed up by a devotee in an invocatory verse: "My salutations unto the holy feet of the Sadguru, who teaches yoga through bhakti, gnana through yoga, to all those who because of their mistaken attachment to the ignorant and estrangement from the saints, are caught up in the cycle of birth and death."

It is only when the mind is externalised through the activity of the intellect and the senses, that the world of names and forms makes its appearance. As opposed to this bahirmukha drishti or release of the mind and its emergence, antarmukha drishti or introversion, is the restraint of the outgoing mind and its absorption in the heart. The Swami reiterated this very often saying that the mind under the impulsion of rajas or activity becomes restless and influenced by tamas or darkness, it manifests the external world. Such a mind cannot catch the reflection of the pure consciousness. It has to be made very subtle, pure and placid through upasana, through great vairagya for the practice of atma-anusandhana, abiding in the Self. Total retirement from all activities is one of the important requisites for this single-pointed devotion to Knowledge. The Swami always provided seclusion for the disciples who reached the state of nididhyasana, uninterrupted contemplation, the last of the three stages of Vedantic realization.

He would insist that the devotee should be completely drawn inwards, be in the nivritti marga, the path of total renunciation.

It will be relevant here to give a typical example of the teaching of the Swami from one of his letters to the monastic disciples. It is in the form of a benediction embodying in itself a spiritual instruction of perennial value:

"May Sadguru's Grace be with you to be thinking of That incessantly, to attain Self-Realization or Atma-sakshatkara, leaving behind mind, all mentation and thought, to be that and to be the Bliss beyond all That! Blessings again and again to you to enjoy That, as the Inner Light within you and be That in the Ultimate State beyond all the triad and transcending all duality!

In the state of waking, one is with the consciousness of the physical body and the senses; in dream with the world of names and forms created by the mind with it as its Witness; and in deep sleep as a Witness of itself. In the fourth state or Turiya beyond, one is That as Brahma Vid, variyan or varishta. To be That in the states of a Jivanmukta and variyan and coming down to lower heights now and then, assuming jivahood is the stage of practice. Again my blessings to you to reach the highest state of Arudha, when all is left behind, jivahood liquidated and mind annihilated."[1]

The Swami frequently referred to the analysis of the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep and pointed out that it was only by the merging of the one in the next successively, the fourth or transcendental state of Turiya could be reached. He also instructed his disciples to trace constantly all the thoughts to their source. Attaching the greatest importance to the destruction of the mind, he

[1] Letter to Swami Dasagiri.

often quoted the famous ecstatic outpouring of Saint Thayumanavar: "There the thought (Mind) was born and there again the thought (mind) died and rose purer. All states exist there. There even the trace of duality with an experiencing ego considering itself as Witnessing Self is transcended."[1]

The mind, after having attained to the knowledge of the Reality of Atman, does not imagine, as there remains nothing to be imagined. The mind is then like fire when there is no fuel to burn. In that state, Brahman alone is realised and hence the mind consisting of determination and volition ceases to exist. The mind becomes identical with the Brahman which is devoid of all duality of cognition.

Initiation to Sannyasa

Thus the Swami insisted on the Vedantic discipline and on proper adhikaratva, for without this mental culture initiation to gnanamarga is futile.

To whom can this way of life of sannyasa be given? Surely not to all. No, "certainly not to everyone. Only to those who have opened themselves to the Real". The Swami attached great importance to the order of sannyasa and its place in society. Although he had transcended the ashramas, he himself maintained the staff and the kamandalu, water pot, till the end and initiated disciples to the Giri order. Swami Abhishiktananda is surely right in claiming:[2] "His (Swami Gnanananda's) teaching is fundamentally the way of total renunciation so that finally there is no ego left to manifest itself." We are reminded of the hymns of

[1] Ananda Kalippu.

[2] Guru and Disciple p. 15

Upanishads saluting sannyasins: "*Nakarmana Naprajaya Dhanena.....Parimuchyanti Sarve.*" "Not by work, not by progeny, not by wealth, have they attained immortality. Some have attained immortality by renunciation. That which hermits attain is laid beyond the heaven; yet it shines brilliantly in the (purified) heart."

All those aspirants who strive for self-control, who have rigorously arrived at the conclusion taught by the Vedanta through direct knowledge, and who have attained purity of mind through the practice of yoga and steadfastness in the knowledge of Brahman preceded by renunciation, get themselves released into that region of Brahman at the dissolution of their final body, having attained the immortality consisting of identity with the Supreme."

The Swami was himself an outstanding sannyasin, a glowing ideal before his disciples. The Swami held that renunciation was the corner stone of spiritual progress. One who knows would be completely detached even if one is obliged to act on the level of appearance. A picture passes over the screen; does the screen retain any trace or imprint of it? It is interesting to note the definition he gives of sannyasa:[1] "Renunciation is deliverance from sorrow." This reminds us of the Upanishadic injunction '*Tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridha*' Thou shall gain by giving away; thou shalt not covet). His emphasis was not so much on external renunciation (although this is important as a preparatory discipline). That is why he talks of the two kinds of renunciation — external and internal, where he hails the latter. He would even say 'Renounce the desire for sannyasa". For it is not the ochre robes and other insignia of the sannyasa — danda, kamandalu — that make

[1] GIV p. 153-154.

one a Brahmanishta. It is emptying yourself even of the faintest trace of ego that is important.[1]

The Swami would forgive an erring layman but he could never forgive those who had taken the vows and the robes of a sannyasin. For, as Swami Abhishiktananda puts it:[2] "No one can trifle with wisdom, much less with God. The man who professes to have committed himself to follow the way which leads to God has no right to be less than honest." Thus the Swami would strip a monk of his saffron robes if there was the least insincerity in any part of his being. The Swami would say that the transformation should come from inside, the form should be animated by the spirit. For the cowl does not make the monk.

This reminds us of the interesting colloquy Swami Abhishiktananda had with the Swami, on the life of renunciation. The former asks: "Does not such a life call for a certain amount of austerity, a dose of tapas which becomes indispensable for practising dhyana?" "Dhyana alone matters", answers the Swami firmly.[3] "Every thing else whatever it may be — tapas, solitude, vigil, fasting, poverty — is secondary and has no direct bearing on 'realization'. No spiritual practice has in fact any intrinsic value. One must just see which one is in fact a help towards meditation and which a hindrance."[4] We are more startled

[1] He asks: "Have we managed to drive away the thief (the ego) inside? Have we learnt to renounce the desire to possess? Give up anger? Renounced the lower impulses? . . . Don't we still feel vain, thinking that we are great thinkers, bhaktas etc?" He warns us that there is nobody to guide us here unless we open ourselves sincerely to the knowledge of the Divine within. (GIV p.281). Therefore did Sankara say: "Keep awake always!"

[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 85-86.

[3] Guru and Disciple. p. 89

[4] Guru and Disciple, p. 95.

when the Swami observes that 'japa, going to temples etc. have no relation to Self-realization'.[1] He adds[2] "Even sannyasa itself is not necessary. This ochre robe we wear is far less for ourselves than for others". He humorously uses a homely analogy: "The door-keeper or bus-conductor would do their jobs just as well if they were wearing white dhoties like everyone else. But their special dress indicates that they are the ones to address oneself to on certain matters. This applies to the sannyasin to whom people come to seek help for their souls. As for the policeman's uniform, that serves to keep people at a respectful distance and to make a would-be evil-doer stop and think. Is there not a slight similarity here between it and the sadhu's robe?" Thus, being an ativarnashrami — one who has transcended all ashramas — the Swami still wore ochre robes; he gave protection to sannyasins and wanted that they be held in high esteem.

The Swami's concept of sannyasa can be fittingly described only in the words of one of his greatest disciples:[3] "The essential rule of the sannyasin is to be totally free from desire, or rather he has but one desire — the desire for God alone . . . . His desire for God is the desire for one who is beyond all forms, for communion with the One — without a second, for a joy which is beyond all delights of the senses, and a bliss from which has disappeared all distinction between 'enjoyer' and 'enjoyed'. With this unique and transcendent desire the sannyasin may equally be called a-kama, free from desire and apta-kama, one whose desire is satisfied."

[1] GIV p. 361.

[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 89.

[3] The Further Shore — Abhishiktananda; p.5. All ensuing quotations on sannyasa are from the same book.

The Benedictine monk goes on to affirm the supremacy of the sanyasin over those who are involved. For he is "Indeed in the world the witness of that ultimate in which man recovers or rather wakes up to his own True Nature." . . . . . .How does he move about in this world? "Free from all cares and desires, he goes through the world as if really not belonging to the world and unaffected by anything whatsoever." (cf. Corin. 7, 29–32)[1]

How does the sannyasin act in this world? "The gnani is above all dwandvas (pairs of opposites) and it is of no importance to him whether he is seated on a royal throne or trampling the road like a beggar . . . .He will show . . . . . in his own life how to perform their human duties with both care and non-attachment and to maintain an unswerving attention to the Presence even in the midst of . . . . daily occupations and preoccupations . . . . . Yet he does not judge, he does not despise, he does not consider himself superior — nor inferior — to anyone; he has lost indeed all sense of otherness" says Swami Abhishiktananda.[2]

In what lies the secret of his unique capacity to act? Swami Abhishiktananda answers: In the freedom that the sannyasin enjoys. He memorably describes it for us: "He has no dwelling place — Aniketana; he stays at the foot of the tree, in a cave, on the bank of the river, in any abandoned house. He goes from place to place, sleeps and takes his food where night and noon time find him . . . . His freedom is complete; he has no responsibility towards anybody nor has anybody any towards him. Nothing will he call his own on this earth, since he cannot even say 'I am the name of this mass of flesh and thoughts' which is his *Sariram nirmamo nirahankarah* . . . "[3]

[1] Further Shore, p. 7.

[2] Further Shore, p. 15

[3] Further Shore, p. 7

His is the freedom of the spirit. "Through him the spirit works as he wills in this world; through his silence, and through his speech, through his solitude and through his mixing with men. Having passed beyond his 'own' self, his 'own' life, his 'own' being, and doing, he finds bliss and peace is the Self alone, the only real Self, the Paramatman. Such is the ideal of the sannyasin. . . . ."[1]

How does the sannyasin achieve that freedom? By intense aspiration. Sannyasa — just as was monasticism in its first appeal to Christians, is directly connected with what Hindu spirituality calls mumukshutva, yearning for spiritual salvation, which can be best be compared with the rushing of a man towards a pool of water when his clothes have caught fire.

The sannyasin is the 'stita pragna' of the Bhagavad Gita, the one free from all rites, all dharmas, as said in the Kathopanishad (2,14).

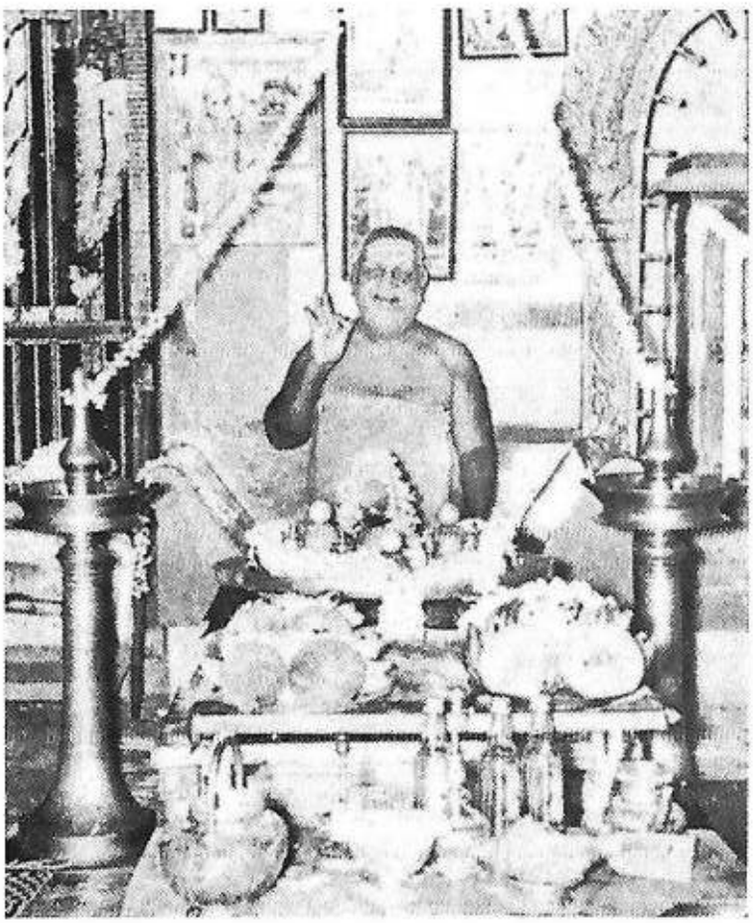
Only one thing is expected from them (sannyasins) that is to *BE* in the fullest senses of the term . . . . "Sannyasins are the libation of their people to God, the highest sacrifice, more valuable than any other, the true human sacrifice, Purushamedha, burnt on the fire of Tapas (inner sacrifice).[2]

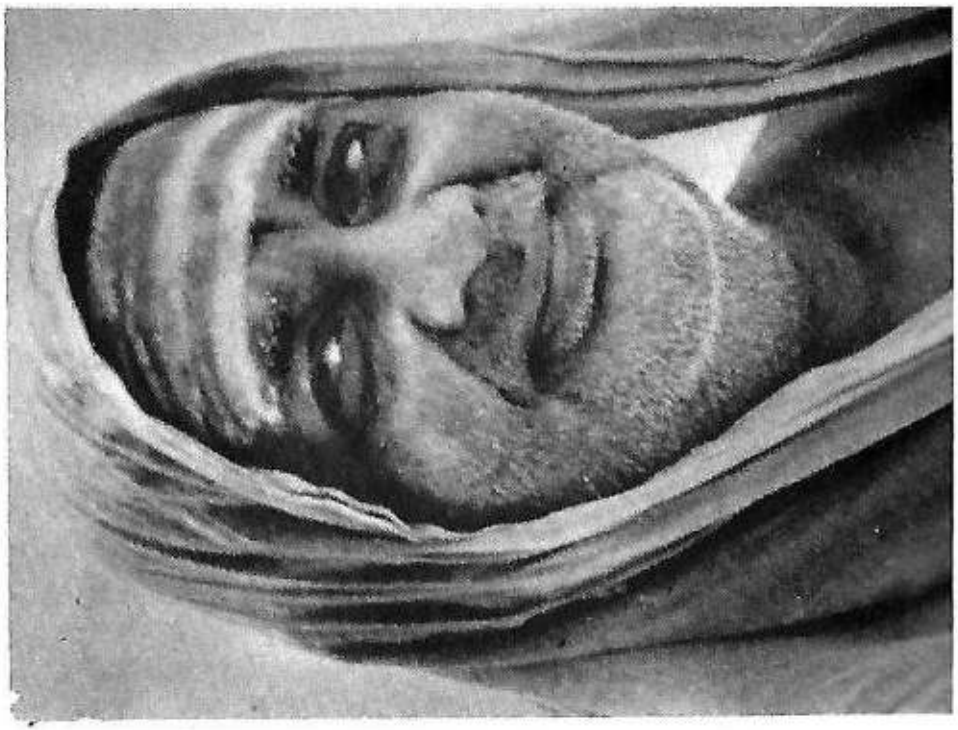
The Swami used to refer to various types of initiation by which the guru might give 'diksha'. Says Kaivalya Navaneetham, a favourite book of the Swami: "The master lovingly considered him like a tortoise its eggs; looked at him like a fish its eggs; passed his hands over him like a bird its wings over its eggs, and said: 'There is a means to put an end to your rebirth. I will tell you and if you act upon it your rebirth will cease!"[3]

[1] Further Shore, p.16

[2] Further Shore, p. 14.

[3] Kaivalya Navaneetham. p. 4. verse 15. "This symbolizes the three kinds of initiation, by thought, by look and by touch."





The Swami chose the place, the time and the person who was to be initiated, with meticulous care. Initiation would be on very auspicious days, either on Sivaratri or Sankara jayanthi or Vyasa pournima.

Once the disciple had chosen the path of sannyasa, he would not allow him to engage himself in any type of activity unless it was essential for Chittasuddhi, purity of mind or had to be worked out as prarabdha.

In Tapovanam the sannyasin is not given to action but required to develop uparati (withdrawal) and inward-turnedness so that vichara, self inquiry, could be fruitful. The Swami would be very strict on sannyasins maintaining seclusion, never getting involved in the ashram activities. It was significant in this context that such seclusion was provided for the aspirant in the Yercaud ashram. When he thus gave the injunction "Be still" (*Summa iru*) to the advanced contemplatives he meant that they had no duties to perform, not even to their masters. He was strict with them; he would not spare the rod. He put them through a period of rigorous tests and trials.

His treatment of sannyasins would be very rigorous. There would not be any regular hours for food for them. Although they were together, on some days milk would be sent up at night only to some of them, the others being deliberately neglected. They would be asked to take specially prepared food in a separate room and then there would come a day when they would be asked to fend for themselves in the dining hall. Again under instructions from the Swami, food served would be particularly distasteful. He would watch their reaction. Omkaragiri Swami, was the special target of Swami's "mercy". There were days when he had to go without food. The Swami would test whether he was bothered about it. He would abuse him in

the presence of others, calling him 'Vazhapazha Swami' — that he was fond of plantains. The Swami would silently admire the reactionlessness of this blessed monk. Thus he would train them in the control of senses, in the annihilation of the ego and in developing reactionlessness. The Swami was particular that they live in the traditional manner, doing sravana, manana and nididhyasana.

He, however, used to say that initiation into sannyasa need not be a formal affair. A visitor asked the Swami: "Does Swami need perform rites of initiation?" "What is the use of initiation?" came the reply. "Either the disciple is not ready in which case the so called initiation is no more than empty words or else the disciple is ready and then neither words nor signs are necessary. The initiation then happens spontaneously."

The Swami gave traditional sannyasa diksha to those who were deserving. What was important was the personal and imperative concept not only to perceive the transcendent life but also to participate in the supersensual adventure of an individual's hunt for reality. He looked for the mumukshutva, the hunger for the Absolute. If a person had this most lively desire for God, nothing else mattered to the Swami neither, caste, nor creed, nor sex.

The first person within memory to receive sannyasa from him was Omkara Giri. A number of others followed later — Siddhananda Giri, Suddeswarananda Giri, Vidyananda Giri, Triveni Giri, Dasa Giri, Kailasa Giri, Pragnana Giri and Swayamprakasa Giri, Sannyasins like Mukundananda Saraswati and Abhishiktananda who were not initiated into sannyasa by him were nevertheless his most devoted and dear disciples.

The way the Swami taught his monastic disciples vairagya varied from person to person. Like Angelo of Folligon, Swami Dasa Giri used to long fervently for being

totally lost in the Divine. "Ask always earnestly when I shall be perfectly thine. Oh my God" and He still answered her "when thou shalt no longer possess anything and shall die to thyself". Swami Dasa Giri spent the best years of his life in the consecrated service of his master. No work done for his master was mean — be it sweeping the floor, running on personal errands, lighting the kerosene lamps. looking after the office work, even cleaning the bath rooms. He was the slave of slaves of the Swami. The completeness of his surrender was amazing. The Swami made him work day and night. He would not even allow him time for contemplation. He was put through a series of trials and tribulations that made him like refined gold with no dross left. The uncomplaining service of Swami Dasa Giri earned him the extraordinary measure of the grace of the Swami. Swami Dasa Giri's service reminds us of that degree of surrender demanded by Vivekananda from his initiates[1], "Are you ready to obey my orders implicitly? If I ask you to face a tiger or a venomous snake, if I ask you to jump into the Ganga and catch a crocodile, or if I want to sell you to work the rest of your life in a tea garden in Assam as coolies or burn yourselves in a slow fire thinking it will be for your good, are you ready to obey me instantly?" Swami Dasa Giri was always ready.

Having thus made him fit for a life of contemplation, the Swami sent him to Yercaud, the centre for contemplation, saying "Now you are on top of the tree from which you can have a perspective of everything round you". The Swami wrote to him thus: "The untrammelled bliss is to rest in the Self and *BE* on the pinnacle of Karma yoga, constantly aware of the ineffable intuition of Reality", a

[1] Life of Swami Vivekananda — by his Eastern & Western disciples p. 499.

letter already cited. It is significant that it was written to Swami Dasa Giri who was himself a true Karma yogin. In that he shows the secret of a liberated man's action, known only to a true karma yogi. It was written two months before Swami Dasa Giri attained maha samadhi.

Through the Swami's grace Swami Dasa Giri made rapid strides in contemplation in a short space of time. He had also various mystic experiences and visions. The evening previous to his passing away, which happened to be a Thursday, sacred to the guru, the Swami came to his room, gave him darshan, offered vibhuti prasad and told him "Don't worry. From now onwards let us be absorbed in the blissful Supreme Brahman — *Ananda vetta veliyileye manadu layitthu iruppom.* Swami Dasa Giri was apprehensive whether this state was possible of attainment. But the Swami assured him with a benign smile: "My grace is with you always, in an abundant measure." Later the Swami said that Swami Dasa Giri was in a very exalted state of consciousness during the final days of his life. The Swami himslef attended to laying him to rest; he had the body bathed and dressed and decorated with flowers. Proceeding to the site of the samadhi, he spread the earth himself, supervised the last rites. On the eleventh day, the day of the aradhana, although the Swami was very ill at that time, he attended the function and delivered an address to the devotees choked with emotion. He referred to Swami Dasa Giri's concentrated, unstinted service to the guru and exhorted them to pray for the sublime state Swami Dasa Giri was in and attain to that beatitude.

Swami Kailasagiri is another instance in point. He was an agriculturist without much of a formal education but was by no means ignorant. He had disregard for a life of comfort and convenience, a defiance to wordly values

Although Swami Kailasagiri had renounced worldly goods, he was eager in the early days to study scriptures. The Swami made him the librarian — this person who could not even write Tamil properly — and gave him facilities to improve his knowledge. As days went by, to the surprise of all, Swami Kailasagiri learnt through selective reading, all that was necessary for spiritual enlightenment. His shraddha, his faith in the words of the guru and the scriptures was profound.

Still there were fine traces of dehatma buddhi — 'I-am-the-body' consciousness. One day, feeling very sick, Kailasagiri sought the Swami's permission to see the doctor. This was not what the Swami expected of his monastic disciples. The Swami wanted a shifting of the field of consciousness from the lower to the higher levels. However he had a way of letting lessons sink into his disciples without a direct reprimand. Thus, seeing Swami Kailasagiri's anxiety to consult a doctor the Swami gave him permission. But, after hours of waiting Swami Kailasagiri could not get a bus to take him to the town. Then he met a sadhak at the bus stand. While talking to him it dawned on Swami Kailasagiri that the Swami had indirectly taught him to get over his desire to meet the doctor. Immediately thereafter, an inmate of the ashram offered him a home-made medicine which cured him. After this event, which was a landmark in his life, he never bothered about his physical body. He completely overcame his identification with the body and like Swami Dasagiri, would not take any medicine unless the Swami commanded him. He developed tremendous will-power and endured all the sufferings of the body without a murmur. Whatever his illness — he had a host of them — even when it was difficult to stand or sit he would almost crawl to the samadhi of the Swami and offer flowers. The only day he was

not available at the time of samadhi puja was when he was bed-ridden and had to be rushed to the hospital where he passed away. During the last few moments he got out of coma and exclaimed rapturously "I see the Swami everywhere! I see him everywhere!" — an evidence of the Swami's grace.

"I opened mine eyes and by the light of His face around me
In all the eye discovered — only God I saw.
Like a candle I was melting in His fire:
Amidst the flames outflanking — only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes — only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo, I was the All-living — only God I saw."[1]

Manonasa and Vasanakshaya

It is difficult for lay people amidst the turmoil of their daily lives, to realize the eternal ananda of akhandakara Brahman, by means of philosophical reflection and self-inquiry. The Swami, in his compassion for his devotees, trained them individually, each according to his receptivity and spiritual evolution.

The mind and its impurities are big obstacles in the way of self-realization. "Among the five sense organs" says the Swami, "it is the mind that controls the sense organs and the body and makes them obey its commands. Even as mesages are transmitted by means of a telephone, the mind transmits messages to all parts of the body and makes

[1] Babu Kuhi of Shiraz — translation by R.A. Nicholson.

them function. A pure mind purifies the vehicles of perception."[1]

Vasanakshaya (removal of latent desires) and Manonasa (extinction of the mind) along with Gnosis are the three concomitants of the spiritual discipline.

Immunity from vasanas is secured by the dissolution of the mind and the dissolution of the mind by obliteration of desire. The two along with Gnosis are mutually supportive and must be simultaneously developed by abhyasa — personal effort, accompanied by viveka — right discrimination, and by vairagya, dispassion.

Dissolution of the mind means the moment of interception, nirodha, the moment of control holding sway over the mind — the impressions tending to distraction being neutralised, by the manifestation of impressions of control — the moment between an impression which is disappearing and the impression which is taking its place.

Dissolution of the mind is brought about by application to scriptural study, its reflection and contemplation, by Sat Sanga, by the abandonment of latent desires and the restraint of breath. Yama, the vows of self-restraint namely Ahimsa, abstention from violence, Satya, truthfulness, Asteya, non-stealing, Brahmacharya, continence and Aparigraha, non-acquisitiveness and Niyama, observances, namely Saucha, purity, Samtosha, contentment, Tapah, austerity, Swadhyaya, self-study and Iswarapranidhana, devotion, resignation to God have to be cultivated.

The senses having sound, sight etc., as their objects as also the mind should be turned off from their objects and should be meditated on as so many reins handled by the One Effulgent Self for the mastery of the senses, for abstraction, pratyahara. This is followed by the three

[1] G.I.V. p. 150.

internal stages leading to samadhi namely Dharana — concentration, holding the mind on to some particular object; Dhyana — contemplation, continuance of concentration by an uninterrupted flow of the mind towards the object of contemplation and Samadhi, contemplation when there is consciousness only of the object of meditation and not of the mind.

As the impressions of the distracted mind are daily and hourly wiped off by repeated practice, the intercepted mind becomes more and more disciplined in the habit of steadiness; tranquillity is gained, and self-control is obtained.

"The state of stillness is attained" says the Swami, "by cleansing the mind of base thoughts such as kama, krodha and intuiting the Truth by means of the supreme experience (of Self-realization which is none other than the state of mouna) 'I am the Brahman, Brahman am I, everything am I; The atma swarupa which I am is Brahman'. To remain in a state of Slef-realization devoid of mental vrittis is to keep still or reside in a state of samadhi. The state of stillness betokens a state of beatitude which one attains to when one is steeped as it were in sleep, though remaining fully awake and being completely free of mental vrittis."[1]

The well-known mantra in Katopanishad, while explaining adhyatma yoga, the means of realizing the Self says: "The discriminating man should merge the (organs of) speech into the mind, he should merge that (mind) into the intelligent Self (Gnana Atma); he should merge the intelligent Self into the Great Soul (Mahat Atman or Hiranyagarbha); he should merge the Great Soul into the peaceful Self (Santa Atman),"[2]

[1] G.I.V. p. 67.
[2] Ka. Up. I. iii. 13.

For the mind to become Santa or quiescent, the mind itself should be destroyed. The stuff of the antahkarana or the internal organ, as it gets transformed into the successive modes going out to the sense-objects, is called the mind. To achieve the extinction of the mind, the out-going tendency of the mind should be controlled and arrested by constant practice, by thinking of the Atman, without allowing any other thought to arise. Thus, the mental stuff gets transformed into the mode of control, i.e. the mode takes the form of the Atman Itself.

The mind which is only a bundle of thoughts thus becomes extinct, like a fire not fed by fuel. That is why a guru who is a Brahmanishta is described in Vivekachudamani[1] as "One who withdrawing himself into Brahman, is ever at peace; he is like a smouldering fire without fuel".

"Thoughts it is" says the Swami, "that activate the mind. Without thoughts the mind does not function and may then be said to cease to exist. If you turn your thoughts towards the Atman, you will not be afflicted by them. Complete absorption of your mind in the Atmaswarupa is to remain still. Great men have said that to be still is to be happy. But to quieten the mind, to remain still, is indeed a rare feat. Man can acquire the eight siddhis, reside under water, walk on fire, but it is indeed very difficult to control the mind. Can you expect a monkey to keep quiet after you have fed it with nuts and fruits? Even so the mind which feeds on mentations cannot remain quiet. You must control the mind, the monkey.[2]

As explained in Mandukya Karika,[3] the mind ceases to be mind and becomes free from all cognition, for want of

[1] Vivekachudamani, 34.
[2] G.I.V. p. 423.
[3] Mandukya Karika III. 32.

objects to be cognised when it does not imagine on account of the knowledge of the Truth which is Atman. The mind abides in the Self.

Grief, mental distress, nervousness and irregular breathing are the symptoms of a distracted condition of the mind. For an undisturbed calm of the mind, one should cultivate maitri, friendliness towards all living things that have reached the experience of happiness; karuna, compassion towards those who are in misery; mudita, gladness towards those whose character is meritorious; and upekshana, indifference towards those who are wicked.[1]

"That man of supreme fortitude" says the Yoga Vasishta, "whose evenness knows no condition, on whom all desires fall flat like the flow of breath on the Lord of Mountains — the mind of such a one is verily dead and gone for ever. His mind is quite dead, who is never touched by calamity, miserliness, exhileration, infatuation, dull-wittedness, jubilation and the like".

Vasanakshaya or removal of vasanas enables the mind to become guileless.

Vasana is the hankering after things, which gains such mastery over the mind, as to preclude even enquiring into their antecedents and consequents. Pure vasana is of the kind which knows the thing to be known, namely the Supreme Eternal as set forth in the Gita in Chapter XIII, verse 13-18. Impure vasanas are of the nature of Asuri Sampat as set out in the Gita in Chapter XVI.

Impure vasanas relate to the world (concerned with the opinion of the world), to learning (resulting in pride of learning), to the body (false identification of the body with the Self). Impure vasanas should be substituted by a current of pure vasanas.

[1] Yoga Sutra i — 31-33

The removal of latent tendencies of the mind can be attained by cultivating the virtues constituting 'Daiva sampat' or Divine heritage,[1] by the acquirement of knowledge.[2]

The Swami points out that it is due to the vasanas that all attachments arise, and therefore they must be annihilated. He describes it by a striking analogy. "Vasana is like an old creditor. So long as we do not declare ourselves insolvent, we shall be afraid of the creditor who pursues us. When once we come to realize that there is nothing we

[1] Gita Ch. XVI enumerates these qualities as under:

Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and Yoga; alms-giving, self-restraint and worship, study of one's own (scriptures), austerity, uprightness; (XVI. 1)

Harmlessness, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, serenity, absence of calumny, compassion to creatures, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness. (XVI. 2)

Energy, forgiveness; fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride; these belong to one born for a divine lot, O Bharata. (XVI. 3)

[2] Knowledge is described in Bhagavad Gita as:

"Humility, modesty, innocence, patience, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control; (XIII. 7)

Absence of attachment for objects of the senses, and also absence of egoism; perception of evil in birth, death and old age, in sickness and pain; (XIII. 8)

Unattachment, absence of affection for son, wife, home and the like, and constant equanimity on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable; (XIII. 9)

Unflinching devotion to Me in Yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places, distate for the society of men; (XIII. 10)

Constancy in Self-knowledge, perception of the end of the knowledge of truth. This is declared to be knowledge and what is opposed to it is ignorance. (XIII. 11)

The reader is requested to see the brilliant exposition of these virtues by Jnanadeva in his Jnaneshwari.

need and so become unattached, we are truly 'insolvent' of worldliness and the vasanas will then cease to torment us. It is difficult to jettison the vasanas, but with ceaseless practice one can reach vasanakshaya."

The Swami prescribed to some of the initiates the abhyasa of upasana or meditation with the aid of a symbol.

The purpose of upasana is to procure a support or alambana for the mind which is approved by the scriptures and make uniform vrittis or modes of mind flow towards it in such a way that they are not interrupted by ideas foreign to them. These meditations, as Adi Sankara succinctly puts it in his introduction to the Chandogya Upanishad, serve to purify the mind, reveal the true nature of objects and are conducive to the attainment of non-dual consciousness.

Pranavopasana

The most sacred of such supports, for the practice of upasana, is the Pranava mantra. "Omkara contains within itself the peerless effulgence of beautitude. Within the effulgence live, move and have their being all objects — moving and non-moving, the phenomenal world and the world of names and forms as we comprehend them."[1]

AUM[2] is the indicator of Iswara. From its constant repetition and intent meditation on its meaning result the disappearance of obstalces and the turning inward of consciousness.[3]

AUM, which consists of the matras, letters A, U, M and the amatra, has enjoyed a unique privilege among the

[1] G.I.V. p. 114

[2] Pronounced as in 'home'

[3] Patanjali Yogasutra 1.27-29.

mantras and symbols of the spirit. Katopanishad[1] hails it as "This hold is the best, this hold is the highest; knowing this hold one becomes great in the world of Brahman". Its importance can well be appreciated by an analysis of its metaphysical significance. The sound 'AUM' is indicative of the Brahman and Self. It is inclusive of all sounds and hence the support of the world of speech (vakprapancha). "Within the antaratma of every jiva exists always the 'Omkara'. Every inhalation and exhalation of breath echoes the sound of Omkara", says the Swami. As all leaves are held together by a spike, so is all speech held together by AUM.

Since everything[2] has its ground in Brahman, for the purpose of meditation the sound 'AUM' has come to be regarded as Brahman.

The Swami points out that the sound Omkara is sustained by itself in a timeless continuum. All that is past, present and future is AUM, as also that which is beyond the triple conception of time.

Whenever the Swami met people, he would call out a long resonant AUM reminding one of the peal of a temple-bell. The whole atmosphere around him would become surcharged with the Divine Presence, that one could practically sense for oneself the real import of the Pranava, hearing the Swami uttering it. It seemed to come right from the deep recess within. No wonder the Uttara Gita[3] claims "Unbroken like a flow of oil, continuous like the

[1] "The flowing river, the tree bursting into leaf, the singing bird, the child playing, the coolie gasping for breath, all are gathered up in the OM which rings in his (monk's) heart. And all that has ever been or ever will be is the OM which wells up from the depth of his heart ..... For the Om is complete sufficiency and complete fulness." (Guru and Disciple, p. 166-167)

[2] U.G. 23.

peal of a bell (dirgha-ghanta ninadavat) and inexpressible is the culmination of the Pranava.

It will be worthwhile mentioning here that the Swami would, for the sake of His devotees, bring the upasana of AUM, to the saguna aspect also, in the forms of Pillaiyar (Vinayaka) and Devi, his favourite deities.[1]

The krama for Pranava upasana in short is this: "Make one-pointed your Buddhi vritti, without even a moment's interruption on "I am that Pranava Swarupa Brahman!' Meditate on the Self as AUM!"

"Having taken the Upanishad as the bow, as the great weapon, place on it the arrow, sharpened by meditation! Then having drawn it back with the mind directed to the thought of Brahman, hit the mark, namely, that which is the Indestructible.

AUM is the bow, the atman the arrow and Brahman its target. It is to be hit by a man who is self-collected; and then, as the arrow (becomes one with the target), he will become one with Brahman."[2]

Acharya Sankara explains in his Panchikaranam, the process of Pranava upasana; 'A' the waking personality should be resolved into 'U' the dream personality, and 'U' into 'M' the deep sleep personality. Again the 'M' should be reduced into AUM and the 'AUM' into 'I'. "I am the Atman, the witness of all, the Absolute, of the nature of pure consciousness; I am neither nescience nor even its effect but I am Brahman alone. Eternally Pure, ever Enlightened, Eternally Free and Existence Absolute. I am the Bliss Absolute, One without a second and Inner-

[1] "Omkarama Iruppal Ganna Ponnu" — G.I.V. p. 242.
[2] II Mundaka — II ii. 3-4; See also Swetasvatara Up. Adhyaya 1.
[3] Panchikaranam — Advita Ashrama, p.6.

most Consciousness."[1] Remaining in this state of absolute identification is Samadhi.

When the mind assumes the form of conditioned Brahman and rests in it but with the distinction between the subject and object still persisting, it is called Savikalpa Samadhi. When this awareness deepens and the duality of subject and object vanishes, the self becomes one with Brahman and it is then called Nirvikalpa or Modeless Samadhi.

In the Pranava mantra, the identity of the particular and cosmic stand-point is indicated; the universe can be viewed at the three levels, the causal, the subtle and the gross. Mandukya Upanishad[2] gives us the tradition of meditating on the three sound elements of AUM, 'A', 'U' and 'M' as signifying Visva, Taijasa and Prajna and Amatra or the soundless AUM, the transcendent Reality of Turiya. The padas of the Self are Visva, Taijasa and Prajna and the Turiya and that of the cosmic Self, Virat, Hiranyagarbha, Iswara and Brahman. These correspond to the Self in the waking, dream, sleep and the Turiya or fourth states. The Upanishad instructs in a short compass of twelve verses meditation on the three matras of Om, A, U, M and the amatra as the four padas of the Self (Pada matra matrasca padah). The Upanishad also asserts that he who knows the fourth, the amatra, as the Atman merges his self in the Self.

That which is both cause and effect is Omkara. This Brahmarupa Omkara is the same as Atman. "When one knows the secret of these three letters as well as the ardha-

[1] The Swami was very fond of this Upanishad which is 'the epitome of the substance of the import of Vedanta' and used to explain it with great eloquence to his disciples and devotes. It enjoys a very special place of reverence in the Jyotir Mutt.

matra letter from the mouth of his guru, that it is no other than the Brahman, by him is the Turiya-state pervaded in the entire world of phenomenon in the belief "all this is I alone". That alone is the Transcendent Existence, which is the substratum. Even as fragrance exists in the flower, even as ghee exists in milk, even as oil exists in sesamum and gold among pieces of quartz, so does the Turiya Chaitanya stands inter-woven with all things."[1]

The three states of jagrat — waking, swapna — dream, and sushupti — sleep, do not co-exist. The Atma, which is the Turiya, says the Swami, transcends the three states, co-existing with each of the three states, but remains unaffected and independent as the witness.[2]

The Swami explains the nature of the three states of consciousness and the turiya thus, in his work 'Jiva Iswara Jagat': "There are three states of experience of the jiva, namely, the waking, the dream and the deep sleep, corresponding to the three gunas or modes of nature, namely sattva, rajas and tamas respectively. Nothing else exists apart from that Infinite called Turiya, the 'Fourth' which is the eternal witness of the waking state and the ego identifying itself with it and the gross body (and appearing as the intellectual sheath) enjoying gross things by means of instruments of cognition such as sense organs; of the dream state and the ego identifying itself with it and the subtle body (and appearing as the intellectual sheath) enjoying the subject, object and their relationship created by the jiva from the mind stuff and illumined by the effulgence of the Self and of the state of deep sleep sunk in which the ego remains dormant as the sheath of bliss or causal body, experiencing ignorance and bliss."

[1] Yogatatvopanishad.
[2] G.I.V. p. 399.

That ego is sublated in Turiya.

Yagnavalkya instructs his wife Maitreyi: "As a lump of salt dropped into water dissolves with (its component) water, and cannot be taken out again, but from whereso-ever one takes it, it tastes salt, even so, my dear, this great, endless, infinite Reality is but Pure Intelligence. The self comes out (as a separate entity) from these elements and (this separateness) is destroyed with them. After attaining (this oneness) it has no more (individual or particular) consciousness. That is what I say, my dear."[1]

"The manifestation of deep sleep, dream and waking is analogous to the throwing up of the rope by the juggler" points out Acharya Sankara in his inimitable way. He continues, "The (empirical selves known as) prajna, taijasa and visva related to three states, are similar to the juggler, who appears to have climbed up the rope. As he, the juggler, remains on the ground unseen (by the onlookers) having veiled himself, as it were, by his illusion, so also is the truth about the Highest Reality known as Turiya. Therefore, those noble souls seeking Moksha evince interest in the contemplation of this (the Turiya) but not in the creation which is futile."[2]

Even as the chant of Pranava culminates in the depth and serenity of the silence of the soundless amatra, so also the intense philosophical contemplation of the entirety of one's experiences in the three changing states leads to their negation and the intuition of the unconditional changeless substratum of Turiya. The seed of ignorance, which is most strikingly present in deep sleep is fully roasted in the fire of Brahmagnana, so that it may never germinate again.

The Swami was never tired of explaining the intricacies

[1] Br. Up. II. iv. 12.
[2] Commentaries on Mandukya Up. and Gaudapada's Karikas 1.6 (7)

of this analysis so that even the lay people could benefit by it. He draws attention to this triple stream of experience in a letter to a monastic disciple in the form of a benediction (already referred to elsewhere in this Chapter.[1]).

"It is the Atma, the Turiya" insists the Swami, "which is immanent in all forms. It is because of this the Maharishis have given it the honorofic appellation Satyam, Gnanam, Anantam, Anandam, Nityam, Purnam."[2]

Turiya, the witness consciousness is spaceless and timeless; but without It, time and space could neither exist nor be conceived of. It is causeless; but without It, the universe bound by the law of cause and effect could not exist. It is the Pure Attributeless Atman, the sole underlying Reality and the unchanging substratum of the perception of proximity in space, succession in time and interdependence in the chain of causality. Just as the fixed and detached screen gives connection and continuity to the succession of disjointed pictures in a cinema, Turiya gives continuity to the experience of the three states which constitutes our phenomenal life. The three-in-one predicament of the triad of knower, known and the process of knowing through which all cognition takes place is absent in this state of contentless consciousness or objectless awareness. It is the condition of being and not of knowing. It is intuitive and integral wherein all differences and distinctions dissolve.[3]

What would the result of this meditation on Pranava be? "Then Satyakama, the son of Sibi, asked Pippalada: Sir, if among men some one should here meditate on the syllable AUM until death, which world, verily, would he win thereby?

[1] Please see page 170.
[2] G.I.V. p. 402.
[3] Abstsacted from Swami Nikhilananda's works.

He replied: O Satyakama, the syllable AUM is the Supreme Brahman and also the other Brahman. Therefore, he who knows it attains, with its support, the one or the other."[1]

Thus is the true nature of Atman realized through Pranava upasana. Bhagavad Gita promises that one attains the Supreme Goal, if at the time of death, meditating on the Lord one utters Brahman, the one-syllabled AUM, with full concentration and control of all senses.[2]

Sravana Manana Nididhyasana

When the disciple has performed some upasana or turned away to a great extent from this materialistic world, the Swami encouraged him in the study of scriptures. It is only when purity of mind has been attained through selfless devoted work, dedicated to the Divine, giving him purity of heart, when the aspirant has been psychically awakened by bhakti and has developed an attitude of renunciation as a fulfilment of sadhana catustaya (the fourfold requisites for an aspirant) that he is introduced to the path of enquiry consisting of sravana or hearing the Truth, manana or reflection, nididhyasana or contemplation. Quoting the first verse in the second part of Kaivalya Navaneetham, to stress the importance of learning the Sruti, the Swami told a brahmachari: "Everyone must understand the fundamentals properly and thoroughly. The flag post must be properly planted and then only the flag hoisted. Men dig a hole, gently plant a long post, fill in earth and ram it in to fix it firmly. Only then, come wind or hurricane, the flag post will not fall down."

[1] B.G. Ch. VIII-V. 12-13.
[2] Prasna Upanishad — Fifth Prasna 1,2.

The Swami encouraged sravana. "The three bodies physical, subtle and causal are non-self and are unreal. The Self, that is the *Aham* or 'I' is quite different from them. It is due to ignorance that the sense of Self or the 'I' notion is foisted on that which is not Self, and this indeed is bondage. Since from ignorance arises bondage, from knowledge ensues liberation. To know this from the guru is *sravana*."[1]

The Swami would sit in the meditation hall at Tapovanam and impart spiritual instruction. He would at times preside over discussions during Vedanta classes and the disciples would feel as if the Sage Vidyaranya himself was participating. The catechism of Arumuga Patthar appearing in 'Gnana Inba Veli' would show how adept he was at teaching the scriptures. Thus, for the qualified aspirant the Swami emphasized the value of sravana.

Sravana, defines the Swami, is listening to the sruti vakya from one's guru who is himself a realized soul.[2] Sravana and the other means are enjoined only in so far as they turn the seeker inwards and direct him to stay his mind on Atman but the resultant knowledge is one's own intuition of the Absolute and only the guru can grant it by his grace.

The Swami was insistent that sannyasins should take up Sravana. For a well advanced disciple, a kritopasaka, the effect of sravana may be immediate.

He provided adequate facilities for studying the scriptures at Tapovanam. Classes were conducted by a great sannyasin who was an authority on the Sankara Bhashya on prasthanatraya, the prakarana-granthas and had undergone scholastic learning in the traditional manner. Occasionally the Swami would be present at such classes when he would look like Sankara himself teaching at once by practice and precept, what a Mumukshu should do. He would say that whatever may be one's stage in the spiritual ascent, one could always profit by listening to the scriptures. With an understanding compassion, he would encourage his disciples to raise questions to dispel genuine doubts. The Swami's grace would condition the mind of the listeners for a greater concentration and receptivity.

[1] Introduction to Vivekachudamani — The collected works of Ramana Maharshi — Edited by Arthur Osborne. p. 193 (III edn).

[2] G.I.V. p. 63.

The Swami, by virtue of his intensive training and deep and sustained study at the Jyotir Mutt under his Guru, and also his extensive travels in Ceylon and South India, was firmly grounded in the Vedantic lore both in Sanskrit and Tamil. But he would say, "Master a simple text, understand clearly, go deep into it, meditate on it and make it your own and become established in the Truth". This reminds one of the saying of St. Thomas Acquinas, 'I am a man of one book'.

The Swami himself had a special liking for the classic work 'Vedanta Chudamani' amongst manuals of Vedanta in Tamil. He also valued the work Kaivalya Navaneetham as it contains the quintessence of all Vedanta. He draws attention to its greatness thus: "In this Kaivalya Navaneetham, the milk of Brahmasutras, the Gita and the Upanishads have been heated up, converted into curds, churned to butter of spiritual knowledge and rendered in Tamil out of compassion and kindness, by Sri Thandavamurthy Swamigal for our benefit. Neglecting study of this valuable book is a loss to those who do not profit by it and does not cast any reflection on the grandeur of the book".

In the early years at Tapovanam, the Swami used to ask the devotees to recite the Brahmavid Asirvada Paddathi of Vidyaranya Swami and instructed that the temple bell should be rung at the end of each asirvada (benediction).

He laid great emphasis on reading this set of verses as a means of understanding and internalising the precepts of Vedanta. To those who were far advanced in sadhana, he recommended Yoga Vasishta.

The Swami employed a unique method of leading his listeners to the essence of the books and of the eternal truths. To a devotee who had not got anchored in the text, he would ask in his own inimitable way: "What does this Vivekachudamani speak of? Does it talk of the need for self-effort, the primacy of detachment and yearning for liberation? Does it stress the importance of bhakti and the place of karma? Does it show how bondage arises and how liberation is to be achieved? Does it discuss what is Atman and what is not? Does it searchingly expound the meaning of Tat, Tvam and Asi and instruct on samadhi abhyasa?" Thus piling up questions one after the other, the Swami would spotlight the topics indicating the essence of the book analysing it subjectwise and helping the aspirant to get to the very core of the book.

The Swami wanted that books which elevate and enlighten be read, chewed and digested. He, however, felt that one should not become completely fenced by the books one reads and become a slave of the ideas contained in them. Books might turn out to be a state of idolatory, a sepulchre of thoughts. They are not magic spells or talisman to take one to the Divine.

There was a danger of the seeker after the Truth being simultaneously deeply immersed in books and shallow in the knowledge of the Self. When Swami Kailasagiri, an initiate of the Swami, went to him with a commentary of Tiruvachakam, the Swami told him: "Limit your reading. Don't go on spreading your interest in books in all directions." He would admonish his devotees on the need to be

wary of sastravasana: "Eschew the pride of pedantry, of punditry". Learning itself ensnares a man.

The man who feels he has understood the Eternal Truth by bookish knowledge, does not really know. The Chandogya Upanishad describes how Sage Narada, though well versed in the sixtyfour subjects of Knowledge, was still ignorant of the Self and feeling remorseful, resorted to Sanatkumara as his teacher. Swetaketu, after having mastered all the Vedas in a short time, had an inflated ego and could not even behave with due reverence before his father. Thus all our scriptures point out in no uncertain terms that pedantic, conceptual knowledge is not the direct and immediate experience, which is the intuition of the Reality. Therefore did the Swami rightly insist more on spiritual discipline and practice of intense dispassion than on study of books without imbibing their essence.

The Swami out of his deep compassion for his devotees, would thus personally guide them as to when they should undertake scriptural study and when they should stop it, since he could correctly gauge the evolution of his disciples and their needs at every stage.

Acharya Sankara says: "Mere book learning will never yield the bliss of liberation. It can be realized only by ceaseless self-effort and the grace of the Guru through self-enquiry or vichara which consists of sravana or devoted one-pointed attention to the precepts of the guru, manana, a deep contemplation and nididhyasana or the cultivation of equanimity in the Self."

Manana refers to the reflection employing the type of reasoning suggested by the Sruti itself conducive to experience. Here, the term 'experience' should be understoood to mean the intuition of Brahman which results at the end of Nididhyasana or Contemplation and reveals in one sweep the whole panorama of everything that is knowable in its

true perspective. Nididhyasana is philosophic contemplation, the last of the triple means.

In this Self-enquiry, he discriminates between the enveloping sheaths or kosas and the in-dwelling Self and rejects the former to know the residuum as Self. Thus it is not a process of mere reasoning on the mental plane, but a diligent practice to make all the knowledge gathered during Sravana, a part of the consciousness by constantly rejecting all that is non-self.

To fix the mind firmly in the heart until the forces of projection and veiling due to rajas and tamas are destroyed and to awaken with unswerving and vigilant concentration on the Self, ceaseless like the unbroken flow of oil, "the true and cognate tendency which is characteristic of the *Atman* and is expressed by saying '*Aham Brahmasmi*' (I am Brahman) and '*Brahmaivaham*' (Brahman alone am I) is termed *Nididhyasana* or *Atmanusandhana* that is constancy in the Self',, says Bhagavan Ramana in his introduction to the translation of 'Vivekachudamani'.

With the discriminative intellect as the instrument, the yogi discards all thoughts of non-self and is steeped in an unbroken thought current, of the Self. Sankara (in his commentary on Gita VI-25) says that this is the highest form of yoga. In this contemplation, there is a constant appreciation that Atman being the self-luminous and innermost principle, by the light of which buddhi knows all things, cannot be the object of knowledge.

The person engaged in nididhyasana constantly remembers that the Witness Self is the Eternal Seer and never the object of sight, that It is Self-resplendent experience, not an experienced object and that It is existence and not the existent.

The aspirant continues nididhyasana till he no longer identifies the Atman with the body and his consciousness

gets firmly established in the truth that Brahman is the sole Reality and the phenomenon of the world is non-real and illusory. That concentration of vritti (mental mode) which ascertains the impartite nature of Atman called the Akhandakara-vritti gnana is the result of nididhyasana. Though nididhyasana is an exercise of the intellect, the realization of the true nature of Reality depends upon the Reality Itself and not on a man's conception of It.

It is only through Sruti Pramana (the sacred scriptures which are accepted as a valid source of ultimate knowledge) that one can by concentrated effort, realize the non-difference of the Atman and the Brahman. Indeed Swami Vivekananada holds that "Vedas are the highest revealed knowledge of all religions". In the scriptures one gets an idea of what the Ultimate is only by indication. It is only after learning the Truth from the Sruti that one can develop one's reasoning (yukthi) to make it realizable as one's own experience of It. The Vedas clearly deny what is not Brahman as 'not this, not this', and indicate Brahman by silence just as a bride says 'not he, not he' of others and remains silent when her choice is pointed out. Brahman is not an object of the senses or of inference and is beyond words. For the aspiring sadhaka only the scriptures can indicate the Ultimate Reality while they also indicate it by such statements like 'Tat Tvam Asi" (That thou art).

The process of discipline which leads one to realize the import of this mahavakya is the vedantic discipline of sravana, manana and nididhyasana; but the final realization is dependent on the guru's grace which one should aspire for with all sincerity.

By continuous contemplation (nididhyasana) alone the immediate intuition of the self-luminous Atman is possible, which also sublates any notion arising of the contrary.

This stage culminates in the practical realization of the import of the Mahavakya and Nididhyasana should be performed till then.

There are four great Vedic pronouncements or Mahavakyas:

"*Brahman is consciousness*"	(*Prajnanam Brahma*);
"*That thou art*"	(*Tat Tvam Asi*);
"*I am Brahman*"	(*Aham Brahmasmi*);
"*This Self is Brahman*"	(*Ayam Atma Brahma*).

All these major texts point to the same truth that the subjective consciousness which is the witness of the three states of an individual experience and objective ground which is the substratum of all beings and is the witness of the universe are one and the same, the Brahman or Pure Consciousness.

Therefore, an aspirant equipped with sadhana catustaya, the four-fold path of prerequisites of discipline reflect on the meaning of the mahavakya after hearing from the teacher the exalted words — words for instance of Uddakka, the son of Aruna, to his son: "Now that which is the subtle essence — in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Svetaketu".

"The real abode of the jiva or the embodied soul is Sat or Pure Being. He is carried away by the robbers in the form of good and evil deeds performed by him on account of his ignorance of his true and essential nature as Atman. The thick jungle to which he is taken is the body, consisting of fire, water and earth and containing bile, phlegm, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, faecal matter and impure elements. The bondage covering his eye is avidya, fastened by the strings of longing for wife, children, friends, possessions and various visible and invisible objects. He cries saying, "I am

the son of so and so, these are my relatives, I am happy, I am miserable, I am foolish, I am wise, I am born, I am going to be dead, my future is gone, I am ruined, how shall I live? Where shall I go? Who will save me?" Then, as a result of meritorious deeds performed in the past births, he finds a compassionate person, illumined by the knowledge of the Self, whose fetters have been broken. The latter takes pity on him, points out the imperfections of the phenomenal life and instructs him thus: "You do not really belong to this world. You are neither a father nor a son. You are Pure Being. 'Thou art That'. The embodied soul, after hearing and assimilating these words of instruction, realizes his true nature as Pure Being (Sat). The covering of nescience is removed and he arrives at his Abode, the Self, or Sat, and becomes happy and blessed."[1]

The Swami explains the import of the Mahavakya 'Tat Tvam Asi' in his Jiva Iswara Jagat, as follows:

'Tat' or 'that' which is the Supreme Brahman, which is also referred to as Iswara, the Lord of the Universe (when describing It by Tatastha Lakshana) becomes 'Tvam' or 'thou' when It superimposes on Itself, avidya or primeval ignorance. Universe, which is a mere illusory appearance caused by Maya is the veil between Brahman and Jiva. When one realizes the full import of 'Asi' or 'Art' and consequently the identity of 'Tat' or 'That' and 'Tvam' or 'Thou', the ignorance disappears and the Self or Atman is seen shining eternally in Its own native splendour. When the three-fold appearance of Jiva, Iswara and Jagat, to which Vedas also refer (in their theories of creation) is related to their changeless and eternal substratum, Brahman will be understood as the only Reality without a second. The Swami used to bring home this relationship

[1] Adapted from Sri Sankara's commentary on Chand. Up. VI. xiv. 2.

by the analogy of a cloud which obscures the sun; when it moves away, the sun is seen immediately and directly. When one is granted this initiation into the great Vedic pronouncement or Mahavakya of 'Tat Tvam Asi' by the Sadguru, the very embodiment of Grace, the intimate experience will take place.

The direct meaning of 'That' is Saguna Brahman, that is Brahman which is qualified by Satva predominant maya. This Brahman is both material and efficient cause of the universe. It is called Iswara, the omnipotent and omniscient creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. The implied meaning of 'That' is the unconditional and absolute Pure Consciousness or the Nirguna Brahman.

The direct meaning of 'Thou' is jiva which is pure consciousness with the limiting adjunct of rajas predominant Prakrti or Avidya. In other words, it is the individual soul, associated with an individual body and with limited and little knowledge, power and other talents, together with Pure Consciousness underlying them. The implied meaning of 'thou' in the mahavakya however is the unconditioned Pure Consciousness whose nature is inmost Bliss and which is also the substratum of the jiva.

The word 'Asi' or 'art' indicates the relationship between 'That' and 'thou' as one of complete identity or homogeniety. Both the terms indicate the absolute, homogeneous unbroken continuum of consciousness. Brahman is Self and Self is Brahman. With this mutual and complete identification, the erroneous notion that jiva denoted by the word 'thou' is other than Brahman, i.e., is one of the many individuals, at once disappears. Another misconception that the word 'That' signifies Brahman which exists outside the self and can be known only indirectly, is also removed when it is directly and immediately realized as 'I am that Brahman'.

The text 'That thou art' is thus an instruction, upadesa vakya, which is to be realized in experience. In the case of an advanced and ripe aspirant (uttama adhikari) merely hearing the Mahavakya just once from a great master transforms him,[1] and he gains an intuition of the ultimate Reality which is termed aparoksa anubhuti (as different from paroksa which is obtained through reasoning). It is said that this actually happened in the case of one of the Swami's own disciples, Sri Achuta Dasa, a vaishnavite bhakta, a singer of Lord's glory who lived in the last century at Polur. He was endowed with intense vairagya and was engaged in constant self-enquiry. He is said to have gone from Polur to see the Swami who was then at Kailasagiri. With a heart melting in compassion the Swami instructed him on the Panchakosa Viveka, on the Atman being the Avastha-traya sakshi and gave him the diksha of Pranava Mantra and the 'Tat Tvam Asi' Mahavakya. The moment he received this diksha from the Swami, Achuta Dasa, it is said, went into Nirvikalpa Samadhi "in which the mind becomes steady like the (unflickering flame of a) light kept in a place free from wind and in which one becomes indifferent to both objects and sounds on account of anubhuti rasa avesa, one's complete absorption in the bliss of the realization of the Self".[2]

Thus for an Uttama Adhikari like Achuta Dasa, the sravana of the Mahavakyas brings about the final intuition of Brahman without any further delay and in the case of others serves as an upadesa to be further meditated upon.

Self-knowledge is the goal of human life (as it bestows Bliss of Atman here and Immortality hereafter). Only those who, through supreme devotion, have developed Viveka

[1] Brahma Sutra — Bhashya of Sankara IV. i.2.
[2] Drg Drsya Viveka — Verse 26.

or discrimination between the Real and Unreal are fit to enter this path of Self-knowledge, says the Swami in his 'Jiva Iswara Jagat'.

We saw earlier that upasana transforms a person, and makes him ready for sravana. It purifies the mind, helps the mind centre around the Jiva Brahma Aikya and ultimately the Nirvikalpa-cinmatra-vritti arises. Success is speedy for the extremely energetic and for those who have become established in complete renunciation.

The Swami was very positive that one could with practice and patience meditate on the Nirguna aspect. He used to emphasize that the mirror of the mind be kept clear, wiped clean so that it catches the reflection properly. Those who meditate on the Nirguna aspect of Brahman become That, as it is well-known that one becomes that which one constantly thinks about.

The supreme method, direct and straight as a parrot's path towards self-knowledge, is through Atma Vichara, constant enquiry on the true nature of the Self. This is the 'Brahmastra' as the Swami puts it, the infallible weapon of Brahma which will drive away all obstructions.

During this process of spiritual unfolding one should try to conquer the tendencies of the lower nature arising in the mind by trying to cultivate an attitude of indifference to them and by meditating on one's essential nature which is pure consciousness and by being a witness to all these thoughts. When this is practised, one slowly becomes indifferent to all the ideas which appear and disappear in the mind, and realizes practically for oneself that the witness to all this process remains unattached and eternal, and all these attachments which were experienced before, were due to ignorance. This is the negative process of trying to erase the thoughts which arise. Alternatively one can follow the positive method of focussing one's thoughts on

the essential self-luminous, blissful nature of the Atman and try to make one's thoughts sublime. This method would also eventually wipe out the ignoble thoughts of the lower self in human beings, since the inner nature of man is eternally divine, and whatever the process adopted, can but ultimately lead to one goal — the bliss absolute. When one thus rests in the consciousness of the unattached Atman, the six passions (kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada and matsarya)[1] which have been pursuing one till then will disappear like the mist before the sun.

The Swami's method of imparting the knowledge of the Supreme was always indicative. Sometimes he would make a mind-baffling statement to be tackled by the aspirant in meditation or by startling, non-logical, assertive type of questions to which the disciple must instantly respond. At such moments one would be reminded of the Zen Masters. A gnana siddha, he would speak in riddles. To a devotee who asked him how one should seek out the Supreme peace, the Swami just said: "In the case of some aspirants the truth falls like a fruit from the sky". The devotee went on searching for the meaning of this statement until he finally got at the story of King Janaka and Siddha Gita and realized what the Swami meant to convey.

The Swami often referred to the Samadhi abhyasa described in the Drg Drsya Viveka: "Two kinds of samadhi to be practised in the heart (within one's self) are known as Savikalpa and Nirvikalpa. Savikalpa samadhi is again divided into two classes, according to its association with a cognizable object or a sound (as an object). Desire etc. centred in the mind are to be treated as (cognizable) objects. Meditate on consciousness as their witness. This is what is called Savikalpa samadhi, associated with (cogniz-

[1] Desire, anger, cupidity, infatuation, conceit, and envy.

able) objects. I am Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, unattached, self-luminous and free from duality." This is known as the (other kind of) Savikalpa samadhi, associated with sound (object). One should concentrate on Pure Existence, which is the same as Brahman, separating the changing aspects of name and form. Savikalpa samadhi associated with sound (object) is uninterrupted reflection on the entity which is (always) of the same nature and unlimited (by time, space, etc.) and which is characterized by Existence-Concsiousness-Bliss. The insensibility of the mind to external objects, as stated before, on account of the experience of Bliss, is designated as Nirvikalpa samadhi. A practitioner should spend his time in the three subjective and the three objective kinds of samadhi."[1]

One must with shraddha practise this Brahma Abhyasa — thinking of Brahman, talking about Brahman, clarifying Brahman to one another, completely absorbed in Brahman without any other distraction. When one realizes that one is Brahman with as much certainty as the ignorant does that he is the body, one has attained the purpose, having done all that has to be done.

The Swami describes the process and experience of Samadhi as follows

"When the mind and prana, becoming one merge into Chitta or Buddhi and through it in the chidakasa or 'the knowledge space', in the heart, and only awareness exists, the person becoming unconscious of objects, his body, hunger and other perceptions, samadhi is attained. Such awareness of mind when the subject-object relationship is still present, is called Savikalpa samadhi. When the 'I' or ego consciousness is totally lost and the awareness is modeless without the subject object distinction, this state of

[1] Drg Drsya Viveka — Verses 23-29.

contentless consciousness is known as Nirvikalpa samadhi."

Awareness is likened to a string threaded through pearls, yet it is visible between two pearls. Similarly, though it is covered by different vrittis of the mind awareness is seen in the interval between two thoughts. It is "the suddha caitanya, free from all vikalpas, seen when the first vikalpa has disappeared and the second vikalpa is not yet arisen."[1] The gap between two thoughts should be elongated. This practice is itself samadhi. Tripura Rahasya explains instances of fleeting samadhi in wakeful state as follows:[2] "When a man remains unaware of 'in and out' for a short interval of time and is not overpowered by the ignorance of sleep; the infinitesimal time when one is beside oneself with joy; when embraced by one's beloved in all purity; when a thing is gained which was intensely longed for, but given up in despair; when a lonely traveller moving with the utmost confidence is suddenly confronted with the utmost danger; when one hears of the sudden death of one's only son, who was in the best of health, in the prime of life and at the apex of his glory."

"There are also intervals of Samadhi, namely, the interim period between the waking, dream and deep sleep states; at the time of sighting a distant object, the mind holding the body at one end projects itself into space until it holds the object at the other end, just as a worm prolongs itself at the time of leaving one hold to catch another hold. Carefully watch the state of mind in the interval."

"When once interruptions in the stream of Intelligence are admitted, it follows that these intervals between the various modifications of the intellect into objects, would represent its unmodified, original state. O son of Kahoela,

[1] Laghu Vakya Vritti.

[2] Tripura Rahasya. p. 130-131 — Ramanashram.

know that if one become aware of these broken Samadhis, no other Samadhi need attract one", so says Janaka to Ashtavakra.[1]

Samadhi can thus be distinguished by its nature into two kinds. When the mind is conscious of its vrittis as objects and itself the witness and is not attached to them, this awareness is termed as savikalpa samadhi. This practice of savikalpa samadhi leads to nirvikalpa samadhi in which the mind becomes steady like the (unflickering flame of a) light kept in a place free from wind, in which the person becomes indifferent to both objects and sounds on account of his complete absorption in the bliss of the Self. Kevala nirvikalpa samadhi is the total absorption bereft of 'I' consciousness, in which the mind totally merges into Brahman and becomes one with It, losing all distinction of knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge. Just as a lump of salt dissolved in water is no longer perceived to be distinct from the water, similarly in that modeless awareness of nirvikalpa samadhi the mental state takes the form of Brahman and cannot be separated from it. The consciousness in this nirvikalpa samadhi is indelibly stamped with the conviction of the unreality of the world and all that remains is the sole Reality of Silence.

Only a person who has annihilated his thoughts and is not swayed by likes and dislikes attains samadhi. To remain in perfect equanimity steeped in Brahman — Atma swarupa is samadhi. To such a person nothing remains to be attained either in this phenomenal world nor in the beyond; there is no pleasure or pain; in short no dwandas (pairs of opposites). The (illusory) triad of appearances of the seer, the object of the sense perception and the act of cognition no longer exist for him. This state is realized only by tapas,

[1] Tripura Rahasya — Publication of Ramana Ashram. P. 130-131.

God's grace and the fruition of one's purva-punya (good acts performed in past lives).[1]

The Swami explains this state of nirvikalpa samadhi to Swami Abhishiktanananda[2] in his inimitable style: "In this there is no longer a without and a within, a self and another. Nothing strikes the senses any longer, neither those of the body nor those of the spirit. There is no longer any thought or feeling. One can be touched, moved or lifted up and one will be utterly unaware of it. It is fulness and bliss; fulness of joy, fulness and joy in one, enfolding all things; the bliss of Brahma, the bliss of the Self, of the atman; utterly pure bliss and joy, total bliss and joy: purnam, anandam, purnanandam, brahmanandam, atmanandam, akhandanandam. . . ." Swami Abhishiktananda adds: "One realized the Swami's gift for mimicry as he beat out the rhythm with his whole body, strongly emphasizing each anandam!"

By constant practice of nirvikalpa samadhi it becomes part of consciousness. Because of prarabdha the yogi comes out of the samadhi back to his ego functions. He remembers, cherishes the ananda in his mind and goes back into samadhi more often. Everytime this happens, the experience impresses on his consciousness. In this Gnana Samadhi he stays as Brahmananda. As it gets stabilized, however, and becomes permanent and continuous, it is called sahaja samadhi. As a result of constant practice of samadhi described above, it becomes quite natural and spontaneous. Then the seeker realizes Brahman everywhere. This was the state in which the Swami was always poised.

Such a person, despite being engaged in normal activities

[1] G.I.V. p .429.

[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 96

and moving about like an ordinary person, beholds the world as in a dream and is always conscious of the Reality.

The Swami explains the state of sahaja samadhi in the form of an analogy as follows:[1] "A curd-seller goes in the street with a pot of curds on her head. People hail her, not by her name, but calling out for curds. She knows she is not the curds and yet she responds to their call. Even so, the Gnani is beyond doubt aware, that he is the Atman, which is Satchidananda. Still he would behave as one subject to the three states which condition the world of name and form. He lives for the good of the world as one belonging to it, knowing this truth fully well. Such a person is said to be in the state of sahaja samadhi."

Abhishiktananda recalls the Swami's words: "Highest of all is the sahaja samadhi in which one has attained the state or rather the original point of self; original because 'born-with-the Self' (sahaja), but better still, 'non-born' for in fact, what is the origin of Being? Here one is beyond either enstasy or ecstasy. No longer is any disparity anywhere perceived. The gnani lives immersed in the world like everybody else. He eats, drinks, sleeps and moves around like everybody else. However, when other people are primarily aware of the diversity of things, he sees their essential unity. When he discovered the Self, he discovered himself and the Self in all things. The 'I', which formerly came between him 'the Self' and others and certainly between his awareness of self and the reality of his being has now disappeared. Henceforth nothing stands in the way of his perceiving reality in himself."[2]

This state of sahaja samadhi is hailed in the Guru Stava Dasakam[3] (in praise of the Swami), as 'Mahabhavam'.

[1] G.I.V. p. 154.

[2] Guru and Disciple, p. 96.

In the bhakti literature, this term 'Mahabhavam' means the ultimate state in the intense longing for God, at once rapturous and ecstatic. Here it means the highest state which an embodied soul can aspire for and enjoy — that of the sahaja samadhi — which is established in a liberated man like the Swami by his effortless and constant awareness of the Self, although he is engaged in normal activities and moves about like an ordinary person. His abidance in the Self is natural.

The Swami's anubhuti, experience, is of the highest reaches of advaitic experience as described in the Dasa Sloki of Sankara. Such a person moves in the rarefied atmosphere of going beyond even Advaita Vasana, as advaita itself is a term relative to dvaita.

All spiritual experiences are true in a relative sense; each one has an essential validity. To a great sage like the Swami, different view points lose their separate identity and the different notes, as it were, merge in a swelling burst of harmony, of a unified, all absorbing experience, which validates every spiritual experience and goes beyond it.

The life and teachings of Sadguru Gnanananda evoke in one, such an apocalyptical and unified vision. Therein lies his unique contribution, which is both profoundly simple, and completely satisfying.

Such a person's experience can only be indicated. It is difficult to capture it in words. We can only recall the words of Sankara to explain the Swami's proudanubhuti. "Before this what was it that had not been obtained by him?. . . Nothing at all! After the vichara of Vedanta, what is it that had been attained? Nothing! — because he has always been glowing in that blissful state of sukha swarupa. For the one who is not in the state of duality and non-

[1] See appendix for a translation.

duality who is in the state of samarasa (transcendental and unified vision) is there any necessity to have this false enquiry? He thinks the acceptable and the right thing is silence."

It is, therefore, that Dakshinamurthi teaches this truth by silence.

The Swami was Dakshinamurthi incarnate.

Rahuganaitattapasa na yati na cejyaya
Nirvapanad grahadva
Na chandasa naiva jalagnisuryayairvina
Mahatpada rajobhishekam[1]

"O! Rahugana, one does not attain this (Brahmajnana) by practising asceticism, rituals, religious duties, study of Vedas or through worship of the gods presiding over water, fire and the sun, but only by drenching one's body with the dust clinging to the feet of exalted souls."

OM TAT SAT

1 Srimad Bhagavatam, Ch. 5.12.

Epilogue

"THE power of the spiritual forces in the universe is active everywhere but invisible to the eyes and impalpable to the senses. It is inherent in all things and nothing can escape its operation." It is this power that the true sages have felt one with in their lives. Sitting at their feet, serving them with a loving heart, heeding their unattached yet most compassionate advice, one may catch a glimpse of the effulgent rays of the spiritual power that issue forth from them which will transform our lives in a most fundamental way. One may read or talk about God and in that process effectively close oneself to God's presence. But not with these men of God, the saints and sages who are the real salt of the earth. A word from them in that spiritual moment will transform us in a trice.

Saint Thukaram says, "If God is to be found anywhere, He is to be found in such saintly souls and seers and not in the images. In the company of the saints even rustics become good". It is to such saintly souls that one must turn if one wants to taste the bliss that comes from God's, presence.

The life and teachings of Sadguru Swami Gnanananda have left a deep impress among countless number of his devotees. Every waking moment of his life he strived in his Godlike love for suffering humanity to bring home to them the beauty of the human spirit, which a man who lives according to the law of God, can capture and enshrine in his heart forever. In him gleamed all the facets of a flawless and faultless gem of the spirit. Many have learnt the ways of God, sitting in loving devotion at his feet and many more have felt deeply within themselves the endless miracle

of a transformation of the heart and a deep contentment and peace of mind that passeth understanding.

The priceless gifts of the spirit that the Swami in his wonted prodigality strew on all those who came to him in true humility, have enriched their lives and their hearts.

He never did or said anything which was tainted with the least touch of the ego or self-regarding. While he must have sustained the world in his own mysterious and anonymous way by the strength and power of his spiritual sadhana, perfected and tested to the point of being invincible even as God's power is, he never wanted it chronicled.

His childlike simplicity and sweetness hid from others his astonishing spiritual knowledge and attainments. He was a person who lived every moment of his life in constant communion with the divine reality. He exuded a warm sympathy and understanding that was most captivating. He was never put off by life's vexations that Providence sends to enhance the value of its favours, but met them with a mien full of tenderness and love, serenity and sympathy. He had an unmistakable air of authority but never gave the slightest sign of being sullied by the sense of personal importance.

He strode the stage of life majestically as the manifestation of the divine on the earth. Even the very elements seemed to prostrate in reverence to him.

Time seemed to stand still in his presence. "No point of time was long ago nor by the lapse of ages had it grown old."

He could at times be severe or even uncompromising but never petulent. He was ever trustful and secure as a new born babe nestling in its mother's bosom. No man who came to him felt excluded or despised. He was indeed the divine instrument through which "divine grace is mediated

to those whose unregenerate nature is impervious to the delicate touches of the spirit.'

A man of rare perfection and the knower of Truth that the Swami was, he was God Himself come to rescue humanity from pursuits which are self-stultifying and spiritually sterile. The Swami toiled hard and unremittingly to make people realize that the life of the spirit as exemplified by him in his daily life was intensely practical, desirable, and profitable, and there was indeed nothing that one had to give up to attain it and taste its sweetness except the follies that held one captive in sin — the ego enhancing qualities — self-seeking, sensuality, pride, pretence, covetousness, hatred, gossip, day-dreaming, preoccupation with one's moods and feelings, qualities that are God-eclipsing and fatal to spirituality.

Taking sustenance from divine qualities — non-violence, simplicity, love, duty, faith and charity — and laying oneself open to the leadings of the divine spirit one found oneself transported to the true world, within the world we see, the world of the spirit, "whereof our world is but the bounding shore". The reality of this experience, the serene peace it encompasses, the ineffable joy that one feels bubbling up in one's heart has behind it the un-erring testimony of our great saints and seers. The life of Sadguru Gnanananda is an eloquent affirmation of the truth enshrined in these words.

The soaring spirit of the Swami now pervades the whole universe and lights up the lives of countless number of people. It is a great privilege to have known him and genuflected before him. His gentle spirit is ever hovering over us in love and understanding, showing us the way and lighting up our path towards God realization.

His life could well be summed up in the beautiful words of St. John: "There is no man that may ascend into heaven

but only he that has descended from heaven and became man for love of man."

"Esha devo vishvakarma mahatma sada jananam
hridaye sannivishtah.
Hrida manisha manasabhikiripto ya etad
viduramritaste bhavanti."

This deity who is manifesting Himself in the activities of the Universe, always dwells in the heart of man as the supreme soul. Those who realize Him through the immediate perception of the heart attain immortality.

Om Shanti!

PART II

SADGURU GNANANANDA —

His speeches, writings and sayings.

1. Letter to a devotee[1]

Om Siddhalingamadam,
31-1-1959

SWAMI Sri Gnananandagiri sends his blessings to the beloved devotee. Swami is in good health and wishes to hear the same from you.

Besides paying attention to the essential facilities and requirements for your living, let your mind turn actively to spiritual matters. There is no need for you to pay attention to worldly affairs including matters affecting your village.

Your most important objective is to realise the Atman within. The means to attain it are chanting of the names of God and self-control, that is the control of the activities of the five senses and of the mind, and meditation. If you observe each thought as it arises in the mind and subsides in its Source, the mind will come under control and will become quiet. It is the duty of ideal men to live with mind restrained in this manner.

What is it that you should attain and where is It? (As you practise control of the mind as stated above), you should turn your attention to the Source itself from which thoughts arise and practise fixing your mind there (that is

[1] Translated from 'Gnana Inba Veli' by Justice P. Ramakrishnan

to say, to bring the mind back to the point of concentration, whenever it is distracted, reduce progressively the frequency of such interruptions and focus the mind on the Source). This practice is called (in yoga terminology) "Dharana" or "Sthambanam" or concentration. Gradually the distractions will be eliminated completely and the mind will stay fixed at one point (i.e., flow uninterruptedly towards the object of meditation viz., the Source of thought). When this is accomplished and it extends continuously or unbrokenly, it is called "Dhyana" or contemplation. When the practice becomes perfect (and reaches its culmination when the mind is transcended, i.e., its subjective nature or self awareness disappears as it were, and the subject-object relationship dissolves resulting in their fusion in Consciousness, whose content now is only the Source which is the object of meditation), it is called "Samadhi". Everyone should adopt this discipline of Samadhi Yoga (if spiritual progress is to be achieved). May you realise (in this way) the Supreme Being who is called "That" (in the Vedanta texts) which is Pure Awareness ("Arivadu adai arivayaha"). The goal of human birth is to realise this Most High who is inside the body. Do not waste even a moment of your days, but devote all the time to the enquiry "Who am I?" and in this way realise Him.

(What is the nature of this enquiry?) It is to realise "I am not the body, nor the Pranas (life breath), nor mind, Buddhi and other internal organs". Intuition of that Knowledge (Pure Consciousness) which is the Witness of even Buddhi (the discriminative and deciding faculty), that exists beyond the knowledge obtained through the five senses (with which we cognise the physical world) is Absolute Bliss. That is the Supreme Being. May you realise It!

May you become that Supreme Bliss Itself of which the Tamil poet saint Thayumanavar sings!

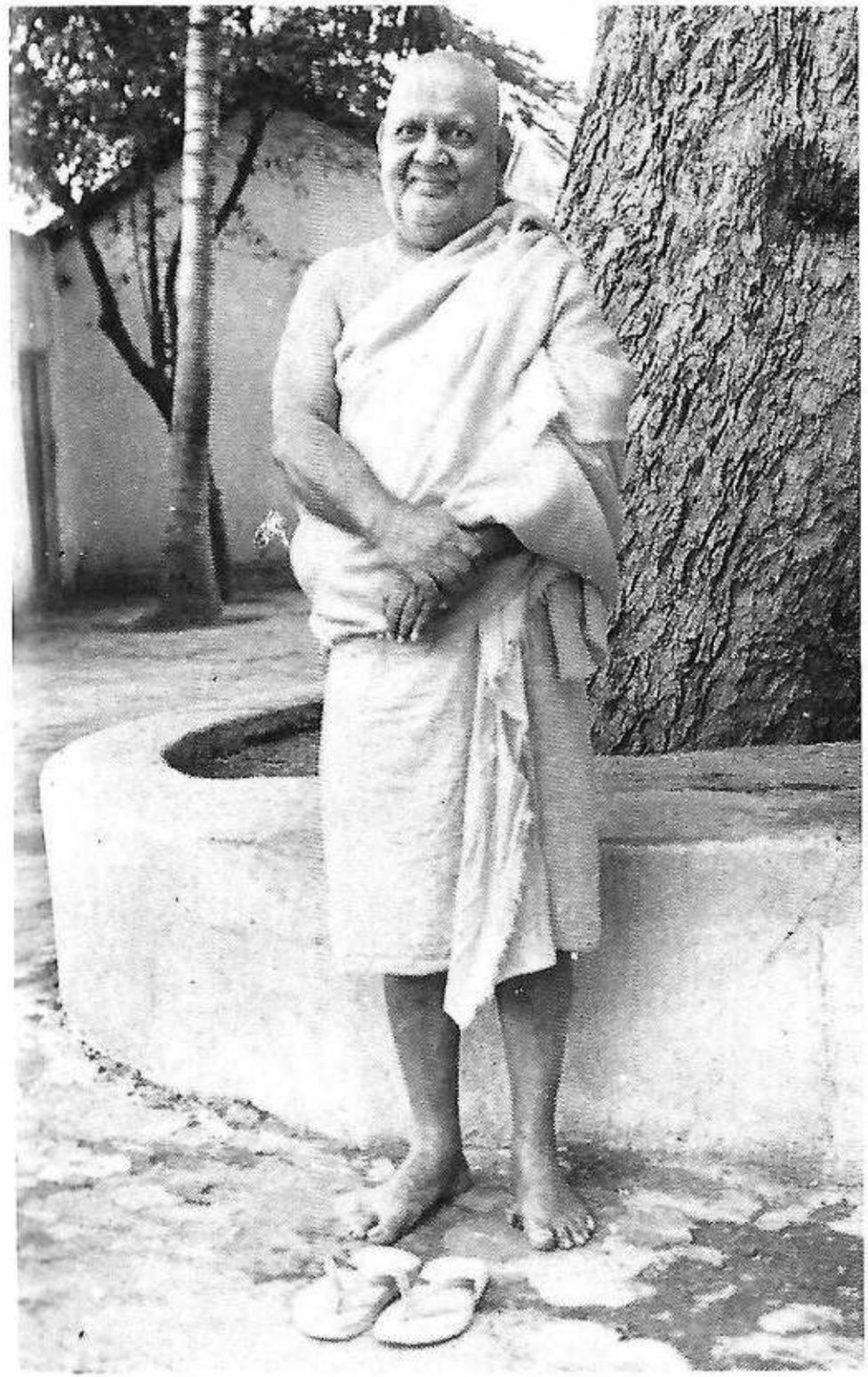
"Oh! Effulgent Bliss! Thou art that Absolute Knowledge which is the God-head enshrined in my heart!" How exhilarating is the prospect (of that goal)! If you remain in that state, people will greet you as "Akhandananda" — the enjoyer of uninterrupted Bliss. For attaining that stage, the Grace and blessings of the Sadguru (which are essential) are showered on you through this letter. All other pursuits are empty and futile. May you attain this goal of life!

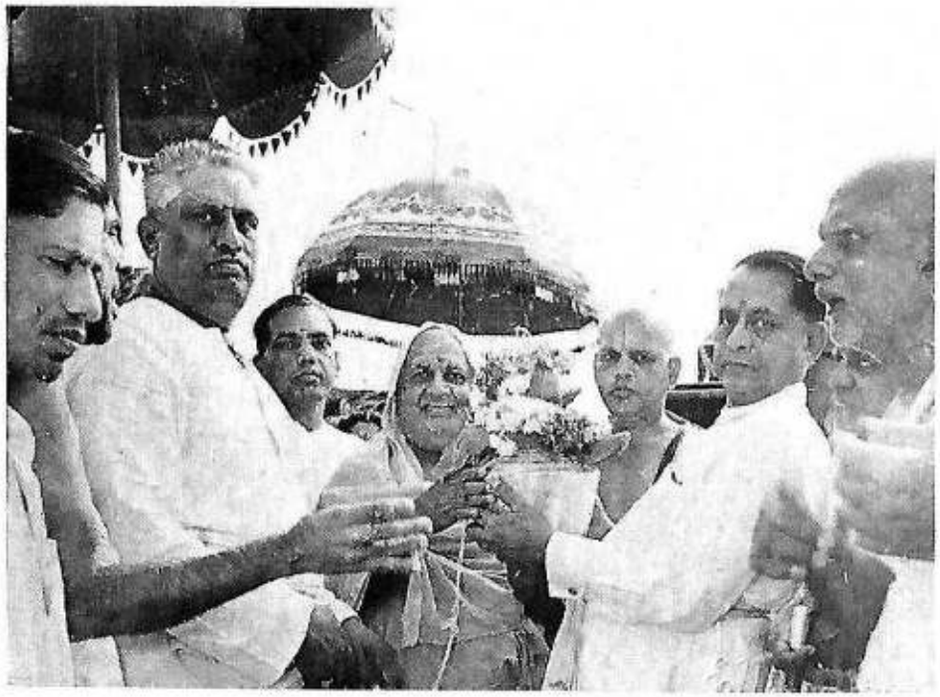
After realising It and staying in that (liberated) state, may you inspire, guide and bless other seekers! Do not spend your time in vain. Do not indulge in loosely talking about "That" which you have not realised, thereby wasting your time and doing disservice to others. Realise the true meaning of "I" and "Thou". (To the Gnani who has attained the state of non-duality, the distinction vanishes). Approach men of real wisdom and learn all other things. Such men are those who after acquiring from the study of books that knowledge which is necessary, would have realised "That" which has to be realised and would be staying as the Truth itself in a state of untrammelled Bliss. There is no need to wander from place to place to obtain knowledge. He alone is the Seer who by self-enquiry has realised the Atman. Others are only mere prattlers possessed by the devil and wandering about. May you be an ideal man! My Blessings to you!

— SWAMI

In Patanjali Yoga, the mental process commencing with Dharana and ending in Samadhi, could be applied to any object of meditation whereas the steps mentioned by Swamiji are for emptying the mind

Samadhi or objectless Awareness. A similar technique of stilling the mind by progressively increasing the gap between any two successive thoughts has also been described by Sri Sankara in "Laghu Vakyavritti". In this method, one should, however, exercise great care to see that the mental personality does not get temporarily merged into some subtle element or into the Original Nature itself, when the latencies and subliminal impressions remaining untackled will force the aspirant to return to the same type of objective experience once again. To avoid this pitfall, he has to be aided by faith or openness of mind without any prejudice or predilection, special vigour and energy, recollection, contemplation, the faculty of higher knowledge and supreme attitude of dispassion or para vairagya *which enables him to remain unattached even to this faculty of higher knowledge and the psychic powers accruing from the same.* — Ed.





2. A Garland of the Jewels of Realization[1]

(The following illuminating address was delivered to a group of devotees at Ernakulam in Kerala, by Swami Sri Gnanananda Giri on 19th May 1965. The original was in Tamil and was tape-recorded.)

Friends,

Let us offer first our prayers to Lord Vighneswara — the remover of all obstacles. Let me also offer my prayer to the Supreme Being, the Supreme Guru, for the welfare of all of you who are assembled here, and then proceed to the subject of my address to you today.

You have often heard of the saying 'the union of the Jivatman and Paramatman' — the Individual Self and the Brahman which is described as Immediate Presence, omniscient and Absolute Knowledge and Sat Chit Ananda. This union is brought about by a process which can be understood by a simple scientific illustration. When a source of high electric charge comes into contact with a conductor, in a trice, the electric current passes from the one to the other, and thereafter, the two exist as one medium for the transmission of electricity. In a like manner,

[1] Translated from 'Gnana Inba Veli' by Justice P. Ramakrishnan

the Jivatman can be considered as merging in the Paramatman; but it is important to remember that this is not a fortuitous union — a union by chance. It is the attainment of a final and preordained goal — Lakshya — which follows a law — Sanathana Dharma — which is as old as creation itself.

This union is achieved only rarely, so rarely that only one, perhaps in a million, gains that experience, after becoming entitled to it, by the acquisition of merit through many births. The acquisition of merit, is reflected in a high state of being, almost divine in its excellence. This merit invests the jiva or the individual Self with such purity of nature that the rays of the resplendent Brahman are reflected in it with full brilliance.

To pursue the illustration given above further, before a current of electricity can provide light and illumination, we know how it has to pass through an incandescent filament, housed in a transparent bulb of glass. The Jivatman who is at the core of every being in this universe, can be compared to the filament, and the transparent glass bulb to a heart made pure, by merit acquired by stages through many a birth. The light of the Supreme Brahman then passes unhindered through a heart made pure, and the jiva shines with the light of the Supreme Brahman. Then the light that shines in the jiva is perceived as one with the light of the Supreme Brahman.

In the embodied state of a jiva, the Omnipotent and Omnipresent Supreme Being is clad in the vestures of elements which are derivatives of Prakriti and which constitute the five kosas or sheaths and three bodies, sthula, sukshma and karana. There are two conditions of the jiva. In one, it identifies itself with the elements and consequently it is whirled about in the world of samsara —

unending chain of births — and experiences the joys and sorrows of mundane existence. In the other, the jiva transcends the matter or elements, i.e. discovers its true nature by negating the five kosas or sheaths, the three bodies or sariras and three states of waking, dream and deep sleep which are superimpositions on the Core which is Atman. It is only when, with 'Mokshapeksha' or intense desire for liberation, by self-enquiry, one transcends the elements as described above and realises the identity of his Individual Self with Brahman, does he obtain 'jivanmukti' or liberation while alive.

It is repeatedly mentioned in our sacred texts that the means to attain liberation is to be engaged in action, without attachment to the fruits. I will now take up one of these texts (given in Adi Sankara's well-known hymn Bhaja Govindam).

"Satsangatwe nissangatwam
Nissangatwe nirmohatwam
Nirmohatwe nischalatatwam
Nischalatatwe Jivanmukti hi"

"Association with *Sat* leads to non-attachment; non-attachment leads to the removal of illusion; removal of illusion leads to the stilling of the mind; when the mind has become still, it leads to liberation in the midst of life".

The phrase '*association with Sat*' corresponds to the Sanskrit, *Sat-Sangatwam*, which can be given an ordinary meaning, as well as a special meaning. Taking part in bhajans, listening to religious discourses, and seeking the company of the good and the virtuous, constitute the ordinary meaning. But I would also like to lay stress on the special meaning, which can be put thus. *Sat* means the

Supreme Brahman, which is eternal, changeless. *Sangam* means the union of the jiva with it. What Sri Sankaracharya wants to convey is that to attain this high goal, it is necessary to seek the company of those who have attained it already.

Next, (in the context of the ordinary meaning) if you want to attain *Nis-sangatwam*, freedom from attachment to what is unworthy, it will be necessary to cultivate association with all that is worthy, and therefore, desirable. By constant association with or thought of the Self, identification with the non-Self will automatically drop off. The discarding of all that is unworthy, i.e. 'all those attachments in this world of name and form which cause the jiva to be born again and again', is Sat sangam.

The next part of the hymn says that the overcoming of attachment leads to the removal of illusion, *Nirmohatwam*. It means that when attachment ceases, the six obstacles to spiritual progress, namely, desire, anger, greed, delusion, self-conceit and jealousy will also disappear and the mind becomes pure.

Stillness — *Nischalatatwam* — a state of unwavering constancy of mind, follows from the removal of illusion, says the hymn. What is meant by 'constancy of mind'? It is the discipline involved in implanting firmly in the mind, the upadesa, or the words of spiritual instruction given by the chosen guru, preceptor, followed by a continuous process of reflection and meditation on its significance. If the mind has become pure, the counsel of the guru can be followed with inflexible resolution from the very moment when it is received by the seeker. It should be held firmly in its place, like a nail driven deep into a piece of green timber. This constancy of mind will lead before long, to liberation (jivanmukti) while in the body.

The puranic story of the boy-saint Dhruva who later on

became the Pole Star, illustrates this. King Uttanapada had two wives, Sunithi and Suruchi. Dhruva, born to Sunithi was the elder, but the king, out of infatuation for his younger wife, was partial to her son. One day as he sat on the throne, he was having this son in his lap and was fondling him. Dhruva went to him and craved for a similar show of affection. Suruchi who was watching this, said to him harshly, "You are not entitled to such attention and climb the king's throne. You will have to propitiate the Supreme Purusha (Being) and earn sufficient merit to be born in my womb!" Dhruva — a child of six — ran crying to his mother, who said "Don't cry, my child! If you worship Narayana, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, He will give you the privilege of occupying the throne, which is now denied to you!" Dhruva asked his mother where Narayana was to be found and she replied that He was everywhere, but He could be perceived only by tapas — penance. Immediately Dhruva went to the depths of a forest to commence penance. Look at the simplicity of the child Dhruva and his pure heart! Lord Narayana, who was a witness to all this, gave orders to the sage Narada, "The child Dhruva has come seeking Me. Protect him from all dangers and instruct him as to how tapas should be performed so that he could receive the full benefit of it". Narada did accordingly, and Dhruva following his instructions, performed tapas, and attained a supreme and unchanging position for all time, as the Pole Star, in the northern sky.

Just like Dhruva, when an ideally mature disciple receives the grace of the Sadguru, the Truth will at once be deeply, and indelibly impressed on him. Like the little prince, his mind will be engrossed in that 'lakshya' or objective, the moment he hears from the guru's lips the 'Mahavakya' which verily transmits his grace. (Mahavakyas are the great pronounce-

ments in the form of terse aphorisms which are the essence of the four Vedas — "Tat Twam Asi", "Aham Brahmasmi", "Prajnanam Brahma", "Ayam Atma Brahma".) In that meditation he soon passes into a stage of total absorption in which body consciousness is no more present; mind plunges into a depthless silence; the perception of the external world disappears without a trace and he is steeped in Objectless Awareness, the sign of attainment of 'jivan-mukti'. This is what is taught in the hymn of Adi Sankara-charya, the discipline which begins with Sat sanga leads to liberation.

Attachment is the root cause of every experience in this life, good as well as bad. As the Gita says "From attachment is born desire; and desire leads to anger". Therefore, cultivate the company of the good to obtain beneficent results in life. The converse is also equally true and bad company is the harbinger of sorrow. But there is a higher concept of sorrow and cessation of sorrow. It is based on the conception that birth is indissolubly linked with pain, and real happiness can be obtained only when the jiva obtains release from the chain of births, and achieves oneness with the Supreme Brahman, which is beyond the three gunas, without beginning or end, Pure Consciousness, Immediate Presence and Satchidananda (Absolute Existence, Consciousness and Bliss). To achieve this goal, the requisites are human birth, and performance of action without attachment to the fruits, that is offering them to please God. The heart then becomes pure, and one seeks the association of good people and men of God. By such *Satsanga*, the burden of sin, the legacy of the innumerable past births is shed. The effect of good deeds of the past is also worked out to some extent by enjoyment. Thus dispassion has developed to a great extent and total indifference has set in towards merit as well as demerit. This is

the opportune time, when the Supreme Being, Parameswara, will take over further guidance. He may elect to appear outwardly, as a Guru in human form, or He may appear in the higher plane of the mind as the Divine or Inner Guru, when, as an act of Supreme Grace, He will grant the needed guidance Just as the external guru appears to a devotee in a physical form, purifies his mind by association, teaches him the Truth and shares his bounteous Grace, the inner guru draws the mind inwards, reveals Himself as Atman, making him intuit that Immediate Presence which is Pure Consciousness and Brahman.

It cannot be over-emphasised that human birth — the most evolved form of life — is granted to the jiva, to provide the opportunity to obtain release from the chain of births and deaths. If this opportunity is missed, and man is indifferent to the vital questions regarding the nature and the goal of existence, he is no better than an animal, an animal without the appendages of a tail and horns, as described in a Sanskrit saying. Man should feel ashamed of himself, if his horizon is limited to the tasks of procreation and gaining the means of livelihood. On the other hand, he should constantly ask himself questions like 'Who am I?', 'Whence have I come into this world?', 'What is the purpose of birth?', 'I am conscious of a residual personality in the centre of my being. Where will it go when my body dies?', 'What is its nature?'. Without seeking the answers to such vital queries, people are content to find out answers to such queries as to who one's father is, his age, the job he is holding and so on. The moment soon arrives when the body is taken to the last resting place. The lives of the majority of people are frittered away in the above fashion. Only a microscopic few are able to realise that there is a principle of Awareness — *Chaitanya* — in the core of each being, and that to know It, is the

most important quest in human life, providing the answer to the query 'Whom am I?'

While engaged in this quest, the Buddhi or Intelligence in man, can be compared to a judge presiding over a court of law. The judge hears the evidence, the arguments of counsel, weighs the reasons pro and con, and comes to a firm decision, from which thereafter he does not budge. The material on which the Buddhi has to rely for reaching a firm conclusion, after making the self-enquiry or Atma Vichara — as it is often called — is explained in many texts, and they need not be repeated here. If I were to proceed to explain in this brief address, the technique of such enquiry, in detail, people are apt to take it lightly, without the earnestness and attention which it calls for. One cannot expect advice in such matters to be given in the form of a sweet pill which can be swallowed easily. The keen desire to seek such advice and take it deeply to one's heart, comes only to a fortunate few. They are those, who, after many births, devoted to meritorious actions, have become ripe spiritually, to receive this instruction.

At the same time, we can consider another aspect of the matter, which arises in this way. The conscientious teacher in a school, does not ignore a pupil, if he is more backward than others, but takes a lot of trouble to explain the lessons to him. In the same manner, there are learned men in our midst, who consider it their mission to explain the vital truths, to the people at large, so that they may be reformed. Realised souls are verily the representatives of God, who is the fountain of compassion. Theirs is the mission of redeeming people from worldliness and leading them on the path of spiritual perfection and enlightenment.

As for my humble self, I am not guided by these nice distinctions. I have come here in compliance with your invitation today, to tell you what little I know. You may

recall the proverb in Tamil which says that in the company of the dumb the stammerer will emerge as the most eloquent. Further, if a traveller loses his way, he will ask someone who knows it, to guide him, failing which he will not be able to reach the end of his journey. From birth to death we are akin to pilgrims on the spiritual path. Meeting unfamiliar situations day after day, we keep on moving forward adapting ourselves constantly to the changing circumstances. It is only when we are in this human body can we achieve the noble goal of Self-Realization.

By listening to the discourses of learned men, dealing with spiritual matters, by seeking their company constantly, and by the perusal of the appropriate spiritual texts, we will gain these objectives. It is a solemn duty to adopt this course, for only in this way, we will be fulfilling the purpose of our human existence.

The spiritual texts mention three Kandas or divisions. Bhakti (devotion), Gnana (knowledge) and Karma (action or work). All these three lead to the same goal — liberation. Though there are many 'ghats' or bathing places, each called by a different name, in which the people bathe in the holy Ganges, they get the benefit of its sacred waters alike.

In its broad sense, the Karma Kanda tells us what to do and what to avoid doing. It has a two-fold objective; first, not to cause any harm to any creature; second, to do whatever good we can to other creatures. There is a proverb which says that if you cannot do good, you can at least desist from doing harm. Put in a nut-shell, this is the great principle of Ahimsa, deecribed as the highest of the Dharmas, 'Ahimsa paramo dharma'. There is a story about a gardener, who, finding a cow which had strayed into his garden, beat it without mercy and then offered it a handful of grass as if it would atone for his cruelty. Acting in this

way, is to make a parody of the great principle. Ahimsa has to be cultivated for its own intrinsic worth and cannot co-exist with cruelty. Dharma can never co-exist with adharma. If we carefully analyse our actions, we will find that most of us, whether wittingly or unwittingly, for obliging others or impelled by past karma, adopt courses of conduct, which cause harm to others. This is not in accordance with the principle of Ahimsa. To limit our actions to those that ought to be done, and to avoid doing all those that are prohibited and which are likely to injure others is the essence of Karma Kanda. This statement will be found more fully discussed in the various works dealing with the subject.

I will next take up bhakti. When our actions begin to be governed in this manner, the Atman in us — which is Dharma incarnate — exerting its force, will take us closer to itself, with infinite love. Its counsel will be continuously transmitted to our minds to do only what is pure and good, and avoid doing what will cause pain and sorrow (to others). It will be like the bond which arises between a loving parent and his affectionate child. He will not allow his child to go about in the hot sun or in the rain; he will not allow him to join bad company. He will draw the child close to himself, keep him always by his side, hug him and caress him. In the same way, the Atman, the witness in us, will draw the mind to Itself and the mind will become lost in it. This will be the sign of true bhakti. Bhakti is derived from the root 'to cling'. Thiruvalluvar says:

"Cling thou to that which He, to whom nought clings,
Hath bid thee cling,
Cling to that bond, to get thee free from
every clinging thing."

It means that one should get rid of one's clinging to the objects of the senses of the external world which is at the root of one's bondage and cultivate clinging to that Atman within us, the essence of Love and Immediate Presence. It is while one is in this stage, that the grace of the Atman will be felt. The Atman will exert its attracting influence, draw the mind to Itself and will still its waywardness, in the same way as a fond parent does to his child.

Unless the mind is stilled in this way, the practice of meditation or the continuous recital of mantras, is of no utility, for gaining the goal. People often sit in meditation, with their eyes closed, but their minds are never still even for a moment; one thought will be followed by nine other thoughts. In such a situation one can pray to the Divine itself to come to one's aid and file a petition to It — so to speak. This is what a great Tamil saint did. He prayed for such aid thus:

"O! my beloved Lord! I thought I would close my eyes
(shut out my senses),
Silence my speech (quieten the mind),
And plunge into the depths of my Being,
This aspiration is only too well known to you.
(When will you shower your Grace?)."

Likewise we should apply to the Supreme Being for His aid. It is only by His Grace, He should draw us towards Him. Then the mind, of its own accord, will become one with the Atman. What has been outlined just now is the correct path to follow, and it goes by the name Parabhakti — supreme devotion. Other forms of bhakti as popularly known, like visiting temples, worshipping images, pilgrimages to holy places, sacred waters (as at Benares or Rameswaram), japa or chant of mantra, tapas or penance,

vrata or vow of austerities, homa or fire offering etc. are only preliminary and preparatory steps.

There is next, what is described in the Upasana Kanda or devotional texts, as 'Daiva Bhakti' — worship of the Divinity. Here, worship is offered to the image of one's Ishta Devata — favourite Divinity, in the form of puja, with various kinds of offerings and meditation. This form of bhakti is the one most frequently met with. It is called 'Sakara bhakti', bhakti towards the Brahman with form and attributes. Nir-akara Bhakti or bhakti towards the Brahman with attributes but without form, is considered to be superior to bhakti towards the Brahman with form. If one asks how it is possible to practise devotion when there is no external image or symbol on which the mind could fasten itself, the answer is mental worship will be possible with the blessings of the guru.

Ordinarily there are eight kinds of gurus. Out of them the Mantra Guru is he who initiates you by giving you a mantra which you repeat in the manner prescribed in the Sastras and propitiate the Divinity (with form). The Gnana Kanda — the texts dealing with the gnana marga — deals with the meditation on the Brahman without attributes. As mentioned already, it is superior to the other two, namely, karma and bhakti. The Vedic texts are quoted as authority for describing these Kandas. There are also innumerable other texts dealing with them, some which describe them in great detail and some tersely as in the Brahma Sutras and others. They owe their authorship to maharishis, sages of old, and Veda Vyasa and Sri Sankaracharya.

These texts which are called Mimamsa — explanatory doctrine — fall into two parts, Poorva or the first part, and Uttara or the second part. The first part deals with disciplines to attain particular objectives or powers, through

japa mantra, tantra and the propitiation of deities. These are all part of Karma Kanda, but unfortunately in our Kali Yuga, they have fallen into a state of neglect.

The second part of these texts deals with Gnana Kanda. They are often called Prashthana thraya and comprise of the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita. Our great acharyas have always expounded their respective doctrines on the basis of the authority of these three canonic texts. With this purpose they have written elaborate commentaries on them and shown how their conclusions have been borne out by all the three texts without any mutual contradiction. The commentaries — Bhashyas — are helpful to follow the teachings of Gnana Kanda in practice.

Let us now address ourselves to the immediate question of what we should do. There are nine ways in which bhakti can be cultivated. [They are: hearing the glories of God (sravana); reciting His names and glories (kirtana); constant remembrance of Lord's names, forms and glories (smarana); service to all living beings seeing Him in all (pada sevanam); worshipping His image (archanam); saluting His image (vandanam); devotion as His servant (dasyam); love as a friend (sakhyam); and surrender to Him of one's all from the body to the soul (Atma nivedanam). These nine are the means and hence called 'sadhana bhakti'.] They lead to nine 'bhakti rasas'. [By performance of 'sadhana bhakti' as above, the mind assumes the form of God. The mental state in the form of God develops into bhakti rasa as 'sadhya bhakti'. The nine rasas are 'sringara', 'pritibhayanaka', 'vatsalya', 'preyas', 'yuddhavira', 'danavira', 'hasya', 'adbhuta' and karuna'.]

But gnana represents a more advanced stage and while following it, the first thing to do is 'sravanam' — approach

those who are adepts, listen to their exposition of the truths and follow up by the intensive study of the relevant Vedantic texts. Next, one should deeply ponder over the ideas thus learnt, and if any doubts arise, they should be cleared by approaching those who know about them and are fitted to give the explanation required for their elucidation. After the goal (lakshya) of the spiritual quest has thus been firmly ascertained by enquiry, one should constantly be engaged in revolving the conclusions reached, in one's mind. This is the sadhana or discipline known as 'mananam'. Sravanam in Sanskrit means 'to hear', and mananam means 'to think over or reflect'. If this process of mental cogitation is unremittingly performed for sometime, the Grace of the Atman will be soon experienced, and it will take over the direction of effort. The mind gets purified in the process and will gradually merge in the Atman which will appear as Pure Awareness. This is the third stage in the discipline or gnana marga and it is known as 'Nididhyasana' — merging in the Atman.

Out of the texts for acquiring gnana, 'Prasthana thraya' mentioned earlier, the Bhagavad Gita is the one that is most widely read by people at the present time. There is a Sanskrit saying which extols the merit of the Gita, thus:

> "If the Gita becomes 'Sugita' — well read and understood — there will be no need to go to any other work for guidance."

It means "The portion of the life span which still remains for many of you is quite small and it should not be frittered away. The goal of existence is to obtain direct experience of the Brahman and the Gita will help you to attain that goal. Therefore, you should read it." The Gita gives you counsel, which will help you in the here and in the hereafter.

Lord Krishna, has taken up the role of counsellor; it must be viewed as counsel of the Supreme Being Himself. The Gita is a work of great efficacy. It has the power to grant you whatever you wish.

One doubt is sometimes expressed about its teaching. Arjuna, whether because of his insufficient spiritual maturity or otherwise, would not accept the Lord's teaching at first. When the Lord persisted, Arjuna said to Him, "If you are really the Omnipotent Supreme Being — as you claim to be — give a demonstration of your power. Mere words will not convince me. You have also claimed to be Omniscient and the Primordial Cause of the Universe. Demonstrate this also!" When the Lord pointed out that the physical eyes of Arjuna were not equipped to witness this demonstration, Arjuna said, "If my eyes are not equipped for the purpose, give me the necessary super-sensual vision, which is your Grace". The Lord then gave Arjuna the eyes of gnana — enlightenment. Arjuna was then able to see the Supreme Being in His Universal form. The vision was so overpowering in its majesty, that Arjuna was again overcome by fear. He cried, "Withdraw this terrifying aspect, O, Lord! I have seen enough. I am now convinced that you are indeed Iswara, the Supreme Lord of the Universe! People say that you have also a form, calm and benign. Please show it to me!" Thereupon, the Lord who had changed from the human form to that of the Omniscient Iswara, now showed His form as Vishnu, with the crown and four arms carrying the conch, discus, mace and the lotus. Arjuna had one more lingering doubt. He said: "O, Krishna! you have now showed me successively your human form as a cowherd, as the Omniscient Iswara and as the four armed Vishnu and I am indeed greatly delighted. Kindly pardon me for any mistake which I might have committed inadvertently, but please tell me which of these

forms of yours is most suited for worship by the devotees." Lord Krishna then resumed his human form and then gave Arjuna the following advice:

"The Viswarupa, the all-pervading aspect of Mine is indeed fearsome; the form of the cowherd may be deemed by many to be unsuited for worship. If you are so inclined, you may adopt the four armed form for the purpose of worship. All these three aspects are endowed with my power and effulgence in the same way and, therefore, the worship of any one of them will lead to the same goal and your wishes will be fulfilled. You can worship any aspect of Mine according to your inclination. All the different aspects are of the same Supreme Being and they are one. Only the method of approach varies, the goal is single. For illustration, you can conceive of three roads leading to a city. One may be metalled, one may be earthen and the third may be only a footpath. Just as any of these approaches leads the traveller to the city, you can choose any one of the different forms for worship for approaching God." This is what Lord Krishna told Arjuna. In the practice of Bhakti marga too, if this principle is understood, the same goal is reached whether by worshipping the Supreme Being with attributes, with pujas and other upasanas, or by the recitation of mantras or by worshipping in one or the other forms of a deity.

Therefore, my advice to you is that the Gita should be studied by everyone in his home with devotion. If some formalities (as prescribed in our religion for Gita parayana) are also adopted, so much the better. The study will lead you unerringly to the supreme goal. If you have the necessary facility, you can also study the Brahma Sutras as well as the Upanishads. More than mere reading of the texts, you can approach a learned person or a guru and clear your doubts, get over the misapprehension of the mere

appearances for the Reality, remove the ignorance and proceed on the path of self-enquiry. Thus, the right path to spiritual progress is one of graded development — namely, engaging in action without attachment to its fruits, leading to devotion to God and ultimately the attainment of Atma gnana. Obstacles in the way of the seeker after spiritual progress are three in number. (Adibhuta — caused by nature — Adidaivata — caused by the presiding deities of nature, — and Adyatmika — caused by oneself. The obstacles are the cause of the sorrows of life; hence they are known as the three sorrows — Tapatrayam. Likewise, what brings about the end of sorrow is also three in number, the three yogas or margas — karma, bhakti and gnana.)

Yoga is the end-point of karma — actions performed without attachment. Such desireless actions lead to purity of mind. The purity of the mind leads to stilling of the mind — chitta (vritti) nirodha — as outlined in the Yoga Sutra. This way of approach and bhakti lead to Nidi-dhyasana or the path of Knowledge. Merging of the mind in the Atman is gnana or intuition of Reality. Therefore, the three ways outlined above bring about the end of the three sorrows of earthly existence, 'Tapatraya'.

As an alternative to the discipline outlined above — that it is to say if you are not in a position to undertake it — can be mentioned worship of one's Ishta Devata — chosen deity — in the form of vigrahas —— images, pilgrimages to holy shrines, bathing in sacred streams or pools, partaking of holy water and so on. Even these things should be done in accordance with the formalities prescribed for the purpose. One should have also the blessing of the guru.

Fasts on particular days — vratas — are also prescribed. They can be viewed as necessary adjuncts to the discipline first mentioned, of Karma Marga.

The chanting of mantra is a well recognised method of achieving single pointedness of the mind. The particular mantra suited for a person should be sought from the guru. Continual japa of the mantra leads one first to obtain the power that is implicit in the mantra itself, next the power that can be granted by the deity invoked by the mantra, next propitiation of the Iswara or the Supreme Being and finally by the grace of the Supreme Being, one reaches the highest goal.

The importance of guru's guidance at every stage of sadhana cannot be over-emphasised and can be illustrated by an analogy. Suppose a person takes a document with all the required recitals, from another person but without the formality of registration, the document does not create liability and it will be of no use. In the same way, the benefits of any prescribed form of worship can be realised only if it has the blessings of the guru.

Whatever has been expounded till now is due to the grace of Mahatmas. Those who have listened to it today will surely get the blessings of the guru always. As a consequence, you will obtain bhakti (devotion), sraddha (faith), the blessing of the deities and finally the Grace of the Supreme Being. Thereby you will rise to higher levels in this world and the next. Surely this is a goal worth striving for. May the Supreme Being, the Bhagavan, shower His choicest blessings on you all. With this heartfelt prayer, I will conclude my address.

3. To a Friend from Switzerland[1]

TODAY must be deemed to be very auspicious, for a friend from a place, more than six thousand miles away is with us and has requested me to speak to him touching on spiritual matters. I shall speak to you today on God and Godliness.

The principles underlying the conception of God are so well-known that I have no hesitation in the matter of what to say and how to say it. There lies hidden at the core of everything in the Universe as the Ultimate Principle *Paramatman*, who is without equal and whose essence is Grace. When Paramatman takes on himself the role of Iswara, Overlord, or Supreme Being, he is referred to by different names like God, Allah, Jesus Christ, or Buddha in various countries.

Next, our human birth is conditioned by the Law of Karma, actions in prior births. Having been born we have to complete the course of life. But there are many amongst us who, thanks to their past Karma, do not realise even the fact that they had a birth. When we acquire the state of Godliness, we begin to perceive everything around us in the light of the Atman within. Our nature partakes the

[1] Translated from 'Gnana Inba Veli' by Justice P. Ramakrishnan

nature of the Divine; at that stage, a unique form of joy is experienced and the perception of Atman is obtained. We remain continually in a state of supreme Bliss. We have reached the end of sorrow, the goal of human birth has been attained and the chain of births is snapped for ever.

To attain this state, one should obtain the grace of high-souled persons who have attained such a state already. If you light a fire even from a distance it will be able to provide illumination to many; but any number of combustible materials kept in a dark place will not provide any illumination whatever, unless there is a light to kindle them. In the same way our mind has to receive illumination before it is able to perceive the reality of the Atman within and in that way experience the highest joy. It is a matter of experience that the Grace of the Supreme Iswara is needed to obtain this illumination. When one brings a light, it automatically dispels the darkness around, and objects not seen before suddenly come into view. Avidya or Nescience, keeps our higher faculties of perception in the dark. The Guru helps us to remove that obscurity and enables our higher faculties to function. By association with the Guru, one also obtains the Grace of the Supreme Iswara, leading to the experience of the highest joy. This is the goal of human birth, and its attainment is called *Moksha*, or liberation.

There is another way to reach this goal, the way of *Ahimsa* or non-injury and compassion to all living creatures. If any fellow-creature is in pain, and is seen to suffer, one should show compassion, and go to its succour. Every moment of life should be spent in this way in doing whatever help we can to all living beings. This is also a sure way to attain liberation. Our ancients called this a *Dharma* (Ahimsa Paramo Dharma — the best among Dharmas or

ways of living) and laid down that the experience of the Highest joy can be obtained by *Ahimsa*.

It is not necessary to go on a pilgrimage to Varanasi (Banaris) and other sacred places. By following the way of Ahimsa wherever one happens to be, one can attain the highest merit. I will tell you a story to explain this. Two persons started together, on a pilgrimage to go to Varanasi. On the way they saw a cow in much pain. One suggested that they should stop and help the animal. The other said that they could not afford to tarry on the way; they must hurry to reach Varanasi where alone merit could be obtained. He hurried away; but the other stayed behind and relieved the poor animal of its pain. When he started to go, a miracle happened. The cow followed him calling "Ganga, Ganga (Ganges)". The moral of the story is that the Holy Mother Ganges, to seek whom, people go all the way to Varanasi, herself seeks out the man of compassion to all fellow-beings wherever he is, and grants him the highest reward.

Next, one can aim at a well disciplined life, cultivating a *Satwic* (pure) nature, and living according to the highest ideals. For this, our ancients have prescribed disciplines like *Tapas* (Penance), *Japam* (Recital of a mantra, or a sacred name), *Yagna* (Propitiatory sacrifices).

They will help one to attain certain higher states of being. It is in this context that the words *Punya* (merit), *Papa* (Sin) acquire meaning. They respectively lead to the obtaining of reward or punishment as the case may be.

Our *Sastras* prescribe a variety of injunctions bearing on minute details of one's daily life. The point to remember about them is that they were devised to suit different people according to their status or position in life. Just as the sweetness of sugar candy is to be found in every particle

of it, to apply these injunctions aright and make them purposeful, they should be accepted. with faith and acted upon in their entirety. It is wrong to say "I will accept as valid only such and such portions out of the Sastraic injunctions, because in my view they appear to be acceptable and I will reject the others because I am not convinced of their efficacy." As everyone knows, the holder of a degree of Bachelor of Arts, had to begin his schooling in the infant class, where he might have had to struggle with the Multiplication Table! Again, if you accept the Sastraic injunctions as valid, you must never speak disparagingly of the wise who laid them down. This is what the nasthikas (unbelievers) do. The word nasthikas means those who refuse to recognise the Truth that is at the core of everything in the universe.

It is necessary to have faith in the *Puranas* and other similar sacred works of Hinduism. They refer to incidents that happened in remote antiquity, but they can have a visible link with the world of today. Thus, people are able to point out in Northern India, the location of the Ayodhya of the Ramayana. Just as one delves deep into the earth, to get at rubies and other precious stones hid therein, the Puranas should be studied in depth, for understanding the valuable and beneficent lessons that they were intended to convey.

Our ancients have prescribed the worship of certain Deities for attaining desired objectives. There are said to be thirty three crores of such Deities in the Hindu Pantheon to be adored in the manner prescribed. Their devotees can be classified into three divisions, the highest, the middle and the lowest. A different pattern for worship is prescribed for each, according to capacity. There are forms of worship, indicated for Deities who occupy a high position in the hierarchy. Such are the well-known six Deities (installed in

most South Indian temples — Shan-matha Sthapanas) Ganapathi, Subrahmanya, Sun, Vishnu, Siva and Devi or Goddess. In a lower position in the heirarchy are the village deities, Katteri, Madan and so on. People worship these different deities, according to the state of their spiritual evolution and obtain the appropriate rewards. All the forms of worship which are in vogue from time immemorial, fall in the category of worship of the Brahman with form (Sakara). The worship of Deities should be performed with devotion, heedless of bodily discomfort. Before the modern motorway was laid to the top of the Tirupati Hills, people faced an arduous climb on foot. The first hill involved a back-breaking climb and when they reached the top, Gali-Gopuram, their joy was indescribable. Those who hurry to the top, these days, (sitting in their well-cushioned cars) are strangers to this experience and the intense form of devotion, it gave rise to.

People sometimes ask the question "Is the God whom we worship, inside or outside us?". The answer is this. The Deity whom we worship, can be perceived in the heart (not to be confused with the physical organ, but should be taken as the cognitive faculty of perceiving and comprehending). The heart is like a mirror; when a mirror is covered with dirt and dust, it cannot reflect anything; in the same way, the impurities of one's mind stand in the way of the perception of the Deity in the heart. Association with what is good (*Satsang*) serves like the duster used to clean a mirror, to remove the impurities from the mind and thereafter, the image of the Deity worshipped, will be clearly perceived in the heart.

What has been said just now, leads to the importance of good association (*Satsang*), as an aid to the realisation of God in one's heart. "The very sight of a good person is a harbinger of good", says a Tamil proverb. The reading of

devotional works composed by the great minds of old, listening to their reading or exposition by others, remaining in the company of devotees and respected elders, all constitute *Satsang*. Apart from the above, *Satsang* is good for the well-being of the body. Next, it brings to an end all undesirable associations. Finally, the bonds of desire are torn asunder.

The grace of God is essential for the removal of the impurities in the heart, leading to the perception of God. When one is in the midst of absolute darkness, one begins to feel sleepiness or lassitude. One opens the eyes, keeps awake or does many things to keep awake, but all this will not help to dispel darkness and see objects. But the moment a lamp is brought, the darkness disappears by itself. Similar is the part played by the Grace of God for the realisation of God.

"When one knows oneself, then, all is known", says the Tamil proverb. If we carefully analyse our actions, we will realise that most of us, wittingly or unwittingly, impelled by our past Karma, often adopt courses of conduct, which cause harm to others. This is not in accordance with true Ahimsa Dharma. To limit one's activity to such actions as are absolutely necessary, and at the same time, avoid the doing of all that is prohibited, is the essence of Karma Marga. If one wants to take refuge at the feet of God (Siva) one should be freed of worldly bonds. If one clings to the feet of God, these bonds fall away automatically. If one cultivates constantly awareness of the mercy of God, and attachment to God, release from worldly bonds, will automatically follow.

The Brahman without form cannot be compared to anything that we can describe. It is a continuous state of Pure Awareness, transcending all else. If our minds are

sufficiently advanced spiritually (ripe), God can be, perceived.

I will now deal with the question "Does the Atman dwell inside our being?". Take the common Tamil phrase "Nan dan" which means "myself" (similarly "himself", "herself" etc.). If you call out for the person named Ramakrishna (in a crowd), that person will respond saying "(It is) myself". In the compound word "myself", the former part "my" will denote the ego, the individual Ramakrishna mentioned above. You must ponder carefully over what the latter part of the word "self" will denote. This is of the utmost importance and special significance. That "self" refers to Iswara, the Supreme Being. When that ego in "my" merges or becomes one with "self", all duality will end. By thinking deeply over, we realise that the Supreme Being who is everywhere, is also the Atman inside our being, and that it is only illusion that makes us see the two as distinct. This illusion will last as long as there are bonds of worldly attachment. When you realise that "Self" can only be the Divine Being, Atman within, the ego feeling (Ahankara) represented by "my" will disappear. In the Tamil language the Vedas are tersely described as "Marai" which means that which is "hidden". When the ego and Atman are separated and their nature enquired into deeply, the falsity of the ego will be intuited and the identity of the Individual Self or Atman which is hidden inside oneself with Iswara the all pervading and Supreme Lord will be realised. Then the multiplicity due to distinctions of caste, creed, lineage, rich or poor, will all disappear.

We have read about sages, who, while performing penance (Tapas), remain absolutely motionless like a mountain, and silent, till the vision of God is obtained. But such vision is afforded to them only after the last trace

of egoism has been erased from their minds. I will illustrate this by an example. You are tied to a post, and there is an object at a distance which you are desirious of reaching. As long as you are tied to the post, the object is beyond your reach, but the moment the rope is cut, you are able to reach the object. The object is God. The bonds of Ahankara (ego feeling) that tie the Self to sense objects have to be cut before one can attain God, the Supreme Brahman.

When Ahankara — the "I" thought arises, the Self identifies itself with the five senses, which then become active. Desires arise and attachments are formed. The Self loses sight of its true identity and gets enmeshed in the bonds of the world. Ahankara thus acts as a veil, concealing our true nature. Only when that veil is removed, can we realise our true identity. Such a state is a Divine state, and the great saints of old like Ramanuja possessed it. Though they have left their mortal body, they are still present with us in their spiritual personality.

I have mentioned earlier, that God lives in our hearts. It may sometime happen that Saitan possesses the mind and darkens it in effect, by shutting out all illumination. Practice over a long period of time may be necessary, to get rid of this evil spirit and its working. This is called "Antaryoga". The practice is designed to bring the mind back, and make it merge in its true nature. It is a very difficult task to bring the wandering mind to its moorings. One must cultivate a constant awareness, that the way to attain liberation is to seek for the love of God.

Renunciation is of three kinds. One involves the giving up of one's home, wife, children, family and members of one's caste, and going far away from them all. Continuing to lead one's usual life but with the five senses under strict control, is another kind of renunciation. The third and the most important of all is to perceive every object in its real

essence (as Brahman after going behind their illusory appearance).

People do not revere Sannyasins as divine personages, merely because they have donned ochre robes. Nevertheless, in the olden days, they were treated with utmost respect; nowadays even that respect is waning, presumably because some bogus persons are sometimes found concealed in a Sannyasin's garb, just as Ravana wore a Sannyasin's disguise to abduct Sita, in the Ramayana. But there is often a redeeming feature, even in this. If one wearing the ochre robe of a Sannyasin, goes to commit an offence — let us say theft — the ochre robe may remind him that what he is about to do is wrong, and thereby he may give up his attempt at the last moment. The ochre robe has certainly a high virtue. On account of this, if I ask you all to change to ochre dress and appear, no one may dare to turn up (laughter). What I have told you about Sannyasa or renunciation is sufficient to make you realise that it is a difficult way though its adoption will conduce to remove the impurities of the mind.

There is a familiar saying in South India, that one can touch one's nose with one's fingers either by taking them straight or by taking the hand and the fingers in a circle around the head. It is intended to stress the importance of the direct way of doing things, instead of the devious one. In the same way, the path of renunciation may prove difficult as well as devious to many; the simpler and more direct way of *Satsang*, association with the good — mentioned earlier — may be adopted with ease and profit and the enduring love of God earned thereby. You can also obtain the awareness of the Atman, by self enquiry, by going into the deepest recess of your being. For this purpose, little can be achieved, by searching outside ourselves; the wandering mind must be first controlled and search has

be made inside it. In this search, a crucial point to be remembered is that the mind is not merely an instrument for the perception of objects; it can also serve as a mirror which can catch the reflection of the Supreme Atman. If you follow the course of the out-going mind, the spiritual quest is impossible of attainment, and you will continue to be caught up in the cycle of births.

In the spiritual quest for liberation, nothing can be accomplished without reaching the level of the higher consciousness — Gnanam. So all our efforts should have the acquisition of this higher consciousness as their goal. It is in the possession of this higher consciousness that man differs from the animal creation. Take a cow for example. It smells first the freshly grown grass in the fields before eating it; but it instinctively shies away from grass grown with the help of ordure. If you place before an ant a clod of earth, and a piece of sugar candy, it leaves the clod of earth and nibbles at the sugar candy. If animals possessing only the five ordinary senses of perception, could show discrimination as above, how much more powerful should be the sixth sense — so called — the higher consciousness with which man has been endowed! It is our bounden duty to put this higher consciousness into use and attain liberation. But, on the other hand, we are satisfied with leading lives absorbed in the pleasures which appeal to the outer senses alone. Though we are endowed with the capacity to look above and beyond the senses, we fail to put it to use and soon sink to the level of animal creation.

Here let me pause to point out a lesson which we can learn from the people of the West. Many people go from our country to the West to seek wealth; but we see how many people of the West come to our country to seek the wealth of spiritual knowledge which has no equal. There is here today in our midst, a friend from Switzerland. How

calmly and with what understanding he observes all that is taking place here! It is said that the residents of Varanasi rarely take their bath in the holy Ganges, giving the excuse that the water mains in their houses supply only Ganges water! (Indeed we do not realise how fortunate we are in the wealth of Spiritual Knowledge that has been provided by the wise people in our land from the remotest times!) A plant growing in a miry field bears sweet-smelling flowers; it is the honey bee that comes from afar, that knows their sweetness, but not the frog, which lurks in the mire at the foot of the plant!

The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from all the above, is this. Man can be deemed as worthy of his precious human heritage, only if he puts his higher power of understanding to its full and proper use. Failing that he must be deemed not a man but an animal. Immense wealth and all that goes with it by way of material advantages, count for nothing in this reckoning. There is a Tamil saying "Do only good, and start today itself on that endeavour, without waiting for tomorrow". The moral is that if you are convinced that a certain course of conduct will redound to your good, don't waste any time by procrastination. Otherwise, it may happen that your mind and resolution may waver. It is not often that good thoughts come to the mind. (Compare the vedic prayer seeking for the flow of good thoughts from all directions. — Editor). It is essential to seek for the goal of human birth, which is the perception of the Atman within.

Extracts from other speeches

There is not sufficient time to be spent on the detailed study of the many sacred texts that abound in our scriptures. The urgent need is to seek out the wise amongst us and find out from them what is essential to be known. A Hindi proverb says "Making Merudand (the spinal column) his ladder, he climbs up step by step to the peak". (Reference here is made to Kundalini Yoga, according to which there are two nerve currents called Pingala and Ida and a hollow canal called Sushumna running through the spinal cord. At the lower end of the hollow canal is the "Lotus of Kundalini" in which, in the symbolic language of Yogis, there is a power called Kundalini dormant or coiled up. In the ordinary man, the sushumna is closed. Along the sushumna are ranged centres, which in the figurative language of Yoga, are called lotuses for the purpose of meditation. The lowest one, at the lower end of the spinal cord is called Muladhara; the next higher is Svadishtana; the third Manipura; the fourth Anahata, the fifth Vishudhdha, the sixth Ajna and the last which is in the brain is the Sahasrara or the thousand petalled lotus. If the coiled up energy of Kundalini be awakened and then by long internal meditation consciously made to travel up the sushumna canal, as it strikes the centres, the various levels of consciousness open up to him, giving him super-sensuous perception and when it reaches Sahasrara, in the brain, the metropolis of all sensations, there is full blaze of illumination as the perception of the Self.) In the same way, we must strive continuously proceeding higher and higher, climbing step by step and reach the pinnacle of spiritual perfection and bliss.

We all know how mundane affairs managed in the form of departments, have executive heads to supervise the work of the subordinates. For those engaged in the spiritual quest, there is no overseeing authority to check their progress, except the Supreme Iswara, who is at the core of their being in the form of Awareness, or pure Knowledge. The refrain of Adi-Sankaracharya's well-known hymn "Therefore, be alert! be alert!" cautions us to be always attentive, and turn our mind towards that Awareness, who is the Supreme Brahman who guides all our actions. The six enemies of spiritual progress, Desire, Anger, Acquisitiveness, Egoism, Delusion, and Envy are always waiting like thieves to steal our attention, and turn it to unworthy objects. We must, therefore, ask ourselves the questions "Having you driven out the robber enemies who have obtained a foothold in your nature? Have you been able to give up the urges of desire and passions of anger? Do illusions any more cloud your perception of the Truth? Do wordly possesisons, when you happen to lose them, make you feel the loss keenly? Have you succeeded in giving up the sense of egoism, which is the sense of pride which one feels, because of high position, learning, ability to expound sacred works, adeptness in Bhajans, proficiency in music and the fine arts and so on?" Envy is the feeling that your neighbour should not prosper, at any cost, like the man in the story, who was prepared to lose the sight in both his eyes, if thereby his neighbour would lose the sight in one eye! Instead, you should have the feeling that even if you have to lose the sight in both eyes, your neighbour should be favoured with the sight in one eye at least. Our daily prayers conclude with the invocation "Let the entire people in the whole world be blessed with happiness". This will include not merely human beings, but every living creature in the universe.

Others can teach you skills to tame wild animals like the elephant, tiger, bear and so on. But for the ability to control his lower nature, man cannot go to others for help. One person cannot subdue the evil propensities in another. The ability to subdue them is in each person and it is God-given. Man must deeply ponder over why it should be so and gradually control his baser impulses, which are like wild animals and poisonous creatures lurking in himself. It is futile to try to control them from outside. There is a Tamil saying that after you clear a forest of its tree growth and level the ground, you should bury what has been cut away so that it may serve as manure and not grow again. Likewise, to rid ourselves of our outward evil propensities we must tackle them from inside, and destroy the root cause which is within us. Thereupon their outward manifestations will disappear. Our bad propensities chase us hither and thither like wild animals. We should lose no time in destroying them.

Therefore, restrain the wandering monkey which is your mind, and dwell on the way to realise the goal of the state of human birth. There is saying in Tamil "Whatever be the task he is engaged in, whatever be the situation he is in, the mind of the liberated person is centred in stillness". You must follow this advice. The wrong way, is to clutter the mind with useless thoughts wasting away our lives without taking care to preserve the precious gifts of self-control and Inner peace. It will be like throwing away a valuable gem on the dung-heap. The right way-putting it in a nut-shell — is this:

"Continually engage in meditation, firmly fixing the thoughts on the Atman within, rejecting all else; offer obeisance to the Guru, making the mind dwell on His Lotus feet. In this way you reach your higher Self".

Our days are numbered and therefore every day of our

life is precious. Even if one day passes without being devoted to meditation as above, we should feel regret intensely, for allowing it to go waste. Before going to sleep each night, we should invoke God and take mentally an account of our actions of the day, proper improper and those performed with a Spiritual import. We should then pray to God for forgiving us for the improper things done, and ask for his blessings and grace to perform good deeds. This is the best way of keeping a diary; it is to be recorded in our thoughts and not merely in a book.

'On seeing a peacock dance, a turkey-cock also spread its feathers' says a Tamil proverb. In the same way, a man came here yesterday and said "Swami, give me knowledge, so that I can earn money to maintain my wife and children!" Such is the way of the world. It is the wrong approach to the spiritual quest. For the right approach, you should go to those who have already realised in the transparent purity of their hearts, the eternal Truth which is the goal of life. They will tell you what they had perceived and with their guidance you too will be able to realise that which has to be known. To reiterate, "Realise that which is eternal, and realise it in the depth of your own heart!". There is a well-known verse in Tamil "What appears true is evanescent and therefore illusory; what remains constant and unchanging alone is the Truth". May the grace of Sri Rama be upon us: The world is indeed illusory. Only Brahman whose quintessence is Supreme Bliss is true. Therefore, don't get lost in the pursuit of illusory objects and waste the precious gift of human life. Seek the eternal and changeless Brahman who is the embodiment of Supreme Bliss.

Death is stalking us constantly. A picturesque description of how it may overtake us any moment is given by a great Tamil Seer:

"Today, tomorrow or at the next moment even, sleeping or waking, by day or by night, in fire or air, by the bite of a dog or by the blow of malevolent spirits or by weapons, while dancing, while living in a mansion or while wandering in the forest, life may leave my body, O Nataraja, Lord of the Dance." Man proposes while God disposes. So we should live with the awareness of God. There is both an element of fear as well as an element of devotion in this approach to God. Fear will make you pray "O Lord, I do not know what will happen and to whom at the next moment". Devotion is reflected in the prayer "I have sought you O Lord: Protect me from sorrow and save me from calamities with your abundant grace".

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The puranic story of Ajamila illustrates how it is possible to attain liberation even by the mere recital of the Name of God. It is of special efficacy when the name is uttered in the last moments of life. Hence the Hindus have a well-known practice, for those present near a person at his last moments to recite the name of God to ward off the fear of death from the mind of the dying person. The dying person hearing the name of God falling on his ears, may be reminded of the injunction to think of God at the last hour of life, as explained in the well-known verse of the Gita (Chapter VIII — verse 10) and reach the holy feet of God.

Prayana kale manasachalena bhakthya
Yukto yogabalena chaiva
Bruvor madhye pranamavesya samyak
Sa tam param Purusham upaiti divyam

(He who is able to fix his mind on God at the time of

death whether by bhakti or yogic powers, attains the Supreme God).

The power of the recital of God's name is such that it is capable of transporting the devotee to the feet of God, in the same way as the wind transports the scent from sweet-smelling flowers to your nostrils. The following refrain in a well-known hymn of Adi Sankara extols the effect of the recital of the name of God. "Recite the name of Govinda constantly, O mind, so that you can escape from the bonds of illusion and ignorance". The effect of the recital of Mantras (Japam), and Penance (Tapa) is similar.

But before commencing the recital of the Name of God, or Mantras, or doing penance, we should worship God in one of His well-known forms. Before offering worship to God there should be inner purity. Bathing in the water of the Ganges, performing Pooja to one of the forms of God, all help to achieve this inner purity. This is what has been taught to us by our ancients drawing upon the experience of many. The lesson that they have given us covers the topics of the goal to be attained, the way to reach that goal, the kind of persons who can become qualified to reach the goal, and finally the qualification required to reach the goal. The conclusion is inescapable that if we are eager to reach the goal mentioned by them, the way prescribed by them has to be followed. All this has been laid down so precisely by our ancients that it is superfluous to deliver an elaborate discourse thereon.

It is true that our ancients have prescribed a variety of disciplines for those who desire to become God-minded. They include Penances, Yoga practices, performance of Sacrifices, the giving of gifts to charity, baths in holy rivers, pilgrimages to sacred shrines and so on. The question may be asked whether it will suffice merely to follow these disciplines and do nothing else. The answer is this. Take

the case of a child admitted to the Kinder Garten Class. It does not stay permanently there. Teachers from time to time test its progress and promote it to higher classes. In the same way, consider the world as a school established by God. If we join that school to learn the ways of Godly living, (and adopt the prescribed disciplines), we are bound to make progress. Then at the proper time God-appointed Gurus are sure to appear who will test our progress and guide us to higher levels of spiritual progress and experience.

On seeing the offerings of fruits and flowers before me today, I am reminded of the holy sandals of the great Acharya (Adi Sankara). The wise have laid down that for spiritual progress, no other way is so efficacious as seeking the feet of a Guru. This rule has been proved correct by the experience of innumerable people; my experience has also been the same. The worship of the sandals of the Acharya — Pada Pooja — is prescribed in this Ashram, with the same object in view. Those who desire to offer that Pooja can come forward and perform it with the formalities prescribed for the purpose. There are no doubt certain methods prescribed for the expiation then and there, of sinful actions which one may commit in the course of one's daily life; but to wipe out the accumulated sins of many past births, the only way is to seek the holy feet of the Acharya.

From prince to peasant, the lure of wealth is irresistible to all. There is a well-known proverb in Sanskrit, "All people depend upon gold for support". To the same purport is the Tamil saying "The world is not for those who lack wealth". I will now tell you a story. An old man lay on his death bed. He was a great miser, and he would not trust even his own children. He distributed a portion of his wealth among them but kept the rest in a box, of which the key remained always suspended from his waist. Even as he was breathing his last his hands could be seen straying

towards the key, for at the moment of his death too, his thoughts were centered on his wealth. That is why it is most difficult to give up attachment to wealth.

Assuming that all of us desire to obtain wealth, it will be pertinent to ask ourselves the question, what is the kind of wealth we are after, that which is perishable or something which is imperishable. Suppose, the answer is that it is imperishable wealth that we seek, it will be a further moot question, of what use is imperishable wealth to perishable beings? To make the acquisition of something which is permanent and imperishable worth our while, we must seek a way to make ourselves imperishable. Self-enquiry leads to a stage of inner evolution, when the perception can be obtained of the imperishable Atman in us and in that way we become fit to be the recipients of the imperishable wealth, viz. the realisation of the Supreme Brahman.

The entire range of creation in innumerable varieties of name and form, the body, the three worlds, (the world of man, the world of the Devas and the intermediate world peopled by semi-celestial beings Bhur-Bhuvah-Suvaha of the Gayatri Mantra) and everything within the comprehension of the senses are perishable. The wise among our ancients have therefore laid stress that the goal of human birth is the realisation of the Supreme Brahman, the Iswara who is imperishable and without equal. We have to follow the way pointed out by them to reach this goal.

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The Tamil poet-saint Arunagirinathar, in a well-known hymn, utters strong deprecations against those who do not care to meditate on the lotus feet of God even for half a minute in the course of their daily life, calling them obstinate fools, misers, and clods of earth! He, and others like

him, have expressed similar sentiments, with the sole view, that we will take their advice to heart and reform ourselves. But instead of doing so, barring the time when we are deep asleep, we spend the rest of our time uselessly. ("The world is too much with us", said the English poet — "Waking or dreaming we lay waste our lives" — Ed.)

The prayer of Saint Thayumanavar also comes to my mind. "O Infinite Being! My poor faculties have become tired indeed by roaming far and wide and by the thinking of thoughts without end. I have suffered enough. Help me to cry a halt to this wandering of my mind". Accordingly, let us follow no more, every wayward fancy which leads us to see and acquire anything and everything which happens to catch our attention for the moment. There is something higher to attain as the goal of life than to follow this mad dance (of wordly pursuits) and finally to drop the body as a broken shell when the time to die arrives. What is the way to attain the goal of life which (as already pointed out) is the attainment of Supreme Bliss? To whom shall we go to show us the way? How is it to be reached? These questions should occupy our attention. There is the other side of the picture, which makes us feel "I am this body; I have to dress it well; I have to feed it with tasty dishes; I must give it the company of pretty members of the opposite sex". Such people are prepared to go to any length, even to carry the shoes of others if they could thereby gain their objective. They never miss a meal but wrapped up in dense illusion, they never find time to seek the company of those who live in the ways of God.

When Yama, the God of death arrives at the inevitable hour, who is to be our support? That should occupy our thoughts even now. To quote the Tamil Alwars "From even this moment follow the counsel which I am giving you, so that you can face unperturbed the messenger of

Death whenever he arrives". The counsel is to attain the knowledge of the Atman the goal of the precious human birth, which has been vouchsafed to you. To know what is 'Sat' the thing that exists for ever is the Knowledge of the Atman. It is to be obtained with the help of the company of the wise.

There is a Tamil proverb, "The sacred books contain seven crores of Mantras". Just as small babies catch whatever object is within reach, people are to be found, who mechanically acquire books without number, and throw them away after a short while. On the other hand, selective reading is worthwhile, as tersely put in the Tamil saying of Avvayar "Read books so that their contents are fully digested and completely understood". This is the approach for the study of the Sacred texts. After reading them you should ponder deeply over the meaning of what you have read. In this way, you will be able to obtain peace of mind, the grace of God, health and happiness.

As long as there is a burden of past Karma, the Iswara, the Supreme Overlord, will see to it that the fruits thereof reach you at the appointed time without fail. This is the inescapable Law of Karma. As a consequence of this law, whatever be the objective you strive for, it will be attained only when the appointed time arrives. That is the reason why when anything is accomplished, you should have the feeling that in the last analysis, it was the Lord's will that brought it about. We see around us people toiling hard, people who are plentifully endowed with zeal and ordinary as well as specialised knowledge but the goal somehow eludes them. The lesson to be learnt from this is that we should not slacken in our efforts, but pursue them with the feeling that the fruits of our efforts are subject to God's will.

We should not waste our energies by trying to attempt too many things at the same time. Whatever task we have set our hands to, will be accomplished at the proper time, which will be brought about by the Divine Will. We must act with the firm conviction that we will be guided along the right path, by the Supreme Being, who is smaller than the atom, as well as larger than the largest universe, who is immanent everywhere and whose nature is Supreme Bliss. The feeling should be constantly with us, whatever be the task we are engaged in, whether it be building a house or negotiating for the purchase of a conveyance that it is the Supreme Being who is guiding us in everything which we do and that it is He who will encompass our success. Therefore, it is not necessary for us to seek anything for ourselves. Our lives should be spent in the service of God. Our bodies, wealth and everything we possess, are His gifts and they should be dedicated to Him. In this way, we should get rid of the feeling of 'I, and Mine', for, as the saying goes "He who is able to give up the conceits of 'I' and 'Mine', reaches after his earthly life, a world higher than that peopled by the Gods".

A quarter of a measure of rice suffices to fill our bellies, four cubits of cloth will cover our nakedness, but the thoughts that clog our minds are eighty crores (eight hundred million) in number before we live through a day and night of our life. These thoughts come and vanish like images that are reflected in a mirror, one chasing the other. In this way, we get entangled in worldliness. This is not the proper way to spend our lives. All useless thoughts should be firmly kept our of our minds. This may appear difficult; but if we sincerely pray to God, He will see that our minds are occupied only by such thoughts as are desirable for us. That faith in God will suffice for this purpose.

The three ways of realising God as ordinarily understood — *Karma* (Action), *Bhakti*, (Devotion) and *Gnana* (Knowledge), are in essence, one and the same. This can be explained by a simple illustration. Take the cloth you are wearing. It is woven out of thread, which in its turn is spun out of cotton. Though the basic substance is only cotton in all the three forms, when it becomes thread, its appearance as cotton ceases; when thread becomes cloth, the form of mere thread disappears. In the same way, Gnana (Knowledge) is like cotton, Karma (Action) is like thread, and the finished cloth made up of both elements is Bhakti (Devotion).

The sweet taste of sugar cannot be isolated from sugar, for it is present in every particle of sugar. In the same way, God is present in everyone and everywhere in the Universe. He is part and parcel of everything. Nothing exists without Him and nothing can exist without Him.

Wherever we perceive some-thing in which there is manifestation of Divine qualities, we should show love for that manifestation, take it to our heart, and cultivate kinship with it. If we adopt this as a way of life, we will soon perceive God in our hearts and His abounding grace will be showered on us. If we give up all other attachments, and hold fast to God as our only support, His love will swell by itself, and envelop our whole being, both within and without. The scented joss stick once kindled, will burn out by itself without further need of a fire to re-kindle it.

I am reminded of the cook who said yesterday that he was prepared to prepare most tasty dishes, but there was no one to partake of them with zest and enjoyment. At this stage of my discourse, I have a similar feeling that there are few people who are prepared to put my advice into practice, and follow them implicitly.

There are two aspects of God, one with form and the other without form (Sakara and Nirakara). The formless God is hidden beyond the reach of the ignorant, those who have not progressed sufficiently in Spiritual knowledge. It is to meet the needs of such people, that Hinduism has in its pantheon thirty three crores of Gods who are all with form. If, with implicit faith, such people worship any of the aspects of God with form, — believing them to be real, the God without form who is immanent in the core of everyone's being, will awaken their higher consciousness (the sixth sense), and He will be experienced as Supreme Knowledge. There are attributes to describe God without form. He is ever-existent, unchanging, indestructible and devoid of special qualities. He is Supreme Brahman, who could be worshipped both as God with form and without form. Idols of Gods are installed in Hindu temples so that the fickle mind can fasten itself for support on the God seen as Idol and conceive of God in the particular form of the visible idol. By constant meditation on the form of the idol, the mind becomes steady. The Nama (Name) of the particular deity should be continually recited in the mind. If this discipline is persisted in, there will come a time when God with form will get transformed, and will be realised in the heart as the Supreme Witness, God without form.

There is a legend associated with the Maheswara idol at Tirukkadayur, in Tanjore District of South India. A Brahmin youth suddenly began shouting "Yama (the God of death) is approaching" and caught firm hold of the feet of the idol in the temple. He never for a moment thought the idol to be of stone, nor did he entertain any doubt about its ability to save him from that situation. To him, the idol was the Lord Maheswara in person, and he prayed fervently to be blessed with deathless existence. Thereupon,

the Lord emerged from the idol, as an embodiment of Supreme grace, and chased away Yama. The youth prayed that he should be freed from Yama's visitation for all time to come. Here arose a difficulty. For it was recorded in the books of Chitra Gupta — the Accountant of the Gods — wherein the ordained span of every human life is entered, that this particular youth could live up to the age of sixteen. Being the ordinance of Brahma, it could not be altered. The quick-witted Brahmin youth replied 'O Lord! let the entry remain, but add an amendment to it 'FOREVER'. As a result, the youth continues to live for ever, always remaining at sixteen years of age. His name, Markandeya, is a household word in India.

It can be affirmed with absolute certainty that through the worship of the Brahman with form, one will be able to obtain the perception of the formless Brahman in one's consciousness as Pure Awareness and infinite Grace. If a human being meditates on the form of Sri Rama, the ideal man, or recites Sri Rama's name (or of any other avatar of God) the form of the Avatar meditated upon will appear before the consciousness as a pure radiance corresponding to that form. This will strengthen the devotee's faith in God.

The recital of the name of God is known as 'Japa'. During the Japa, one should fix in the mind the form commonly associated with the God corresponding to that name. Fixing the mind in this manner on the form of the God is called 'Dhyana'. If we combine in this way Japa and Dhyana, the wandering mind will become absolutely still. When the mind becomes still, we will find ourselves freed from all mental worries. At the place where the mental activity completely subsides, there will arise a state of Higher consciousness which will enable us to see everything around us in their real essence (of Atman). After this

awareness, there will arise next a state in which a vision of Supreme Radiance is obtained. This is described as the perception of the Supreme Iswara. This perception is vouchsafed to only a very few after the accumulation of merit through many births.

* * *

The nature of our attachments governs the doing of our actions, good or bad, and these in turn are rewarded as *Punya* (merit) or punished as *Papa* (sin). These accumulate into a vast burden of Karma as birth follows birth in a cycle. The burden of Karma consists of meritorious actions only to a small extent; the major portion is comprised of the heritage of evil actions. What is the consequence? We are compelled to carry this shell that is our human body, ridden with disease, serving as a receptacle of food, from birth to birth, and fill it with innumerable bonds of desires and attachments. We have somehow to think of how to call a halt to this process. God has equipped us with the higher or the sixth sense, only for that purpose. God's desire born out of compassion for human suffering is that man should put to its proper use, the sixth sense and realise the high state of the bliss of God-realisation. There is a saying of the Tamil Saints known as Alwars, "If you have not attained the state of non-return to this world (by another birth), of what avail to you is the possession of a good home and vast landed properties?" Another saying is "we have indeed everything that one may desire, cattle, calves and children, but all the rest is only sorrow". Enmeshed as we are in worldly bonds, we remain blind to everything else. We must learn to think of the inevitable hour, when stricken by disease, we have to face death. The only way to avoid falling again into the clutches of Samsara,

the cycle of births, is to learn to use our higher consciousness, and by constant association with the good (Satsang), learn what are the norms of right conduct, and evolve into a higher state of being. The well-known Tamil saying: "Be careful to choose the right people before associating with them", implies in this context, that if our goal is spiritual progress, we should seek the company of those who have already attained the highest spiritual knowledge.

(After an interval when the Swami called upon some of the devotees to sing a hymn in praise of the Guru, he continued):

The Supreme Creator, first created Sanatkumara and the three other Kumaras, so that they could show to mankind the way to God-realisation. Then He created the great Rishis. To instruct the Rishis in the way of realisation, the Supreme Being appeared as Guru or teacher in the Dakshinamurthi incarnation. As is well-known, this Avatar, appears as a seated figure facing south, keeping silent and showing the "Gnanamudra", by joining the first finger and the thumb of the right hand and leaving the three fingers free. The symbolism is this: The Higher consciousness cannot be explained in words, meditation in silence is the most effective form of communication. The union of the Jiva (the individual soul) and the Paramatman (the Universal Soul) is expressed by the joining of the thumb and the first finger. The three fingers left free represent the need to give up egoism, desire and illusion, as the indispensable condition before Spiritual progress can be attained. When this Avatar incarnated in the land of Bharata, He is said to have sat under a banyan tree. With the lapse of time, people again sank into ignorance and forgot the old teachings. To instruct them again, the Supreme Being decided to incarnate in the world. This time He took human form as Adi Sankaracharya, and was

born at a place called Kaladi in Kerala. (There is a pun on the two words in Tamil: 'Aladi'=foot of the banyan tree; and 'Kaladi'=the birth place of Adi Sankaracharya). The priceless teachings were once again given to mankind by the great Acharya. Let us therefore sing the hymn in his praise with the mention of the succession of great teachers who have followed in the line of Adi Sankara (Guru Parampara).

* * *

There is a mythological legend, describing how the Lord Subrahmania slew the demon Tarakasura, who was oppressing the several worlds. The Lord used as his weapon, Sakti (spear) which was given to him by his mother Parvathi, the consort of Siva. The esoteric meaning of this legend is that to destroy one's ego (Ahamkara) — the "I" and "mine" feeling — it is necessary to seek the help of Lord Subrahmania or Muruga as he is known in the Tamil country. Assuming that you have taken the resolution to destroy your ego, and also invoked the help of Lord Muruga, you need the blessing of the Guru too. Supposing that you have obtained that blessing too, and you commence to meditate on the Vedic text 'I am Brahman' (Aham Brahmasmi), what follows next? In the self-enquiry thus undertaken, the feeling of 'I' will have to remain till the self-inquiry is completed. For attaining any objective, the sense of resolve and determination which is implicit in the 'I' and 'mine' feeling is necessary. While one is in the course of this *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline) the Brahman also must be deemed as possessing a self-identity as well as language. (Pranava. Ed.) An illustration will make the meaning clear. Suppose, you have two pieces of cloth, which you want to stitch together into a single piece. A needle (and thread)

will be necessary for this purpose. Therefore, an instrument is needed for accomplishing anything. While we seek Lord Muruga's blessing for our effort, we have to retain (as instrument) the 'I' feeling. While we are engaged in spiritual discipline, the 'I' feeling will be needed to maintain our resolve and effort. When the goal is reached, there is no more of that egoism or any thought. One who has reached that state would have crossed over all duality and would feel the identity "I am Muruga and Muruga is I". Till that consciousness of identity is attained, (a trace of) ego has to be there. When the egoism is gone, then what is left? Egoism, desire and illusion — these are the three malas or taints. They should disappear without leaving any trace. Then is the Liberation. When the beginningless ignorance which had haunted you through millions of births is got rid of completely, then only can you remain in the Absolute, quiet, calm and peace, no longer beguiled by any expectation or tossed between likes and dislikes. To one who has renounced everything, the Master sitting under the banyan tree said "Now keep still". The disciple exclaims in ecstacy, 'O' Mother, as soon as I heard 'keep still and without words', all objects of perception disappeared, i.e. I entered Nirvikalpa Samadhi or Objectless Awareness". There is nothing beyond that. To be quiet like that, you should purge yourself of the three 'malas' or taints.

* * *

Which is the path to reach the Supreme Being? Who will show us that path? The Guru will show it. The good and wise people will show it if we cultivate their company. Then we will reach the Supreme goal of existence and fulfil the purpose of human birth. All else is evanescent, transi-

tory. These include the body, life, the world and all things that relate to them such as houses, cattle, pompous conveyances. You can reach the greatest heights in the world—astronauts visited the moon even! But all leads to no lasting result.

There is a wise saying "If one would look inside oneself, one can see the whole Universe". Therefore, one should strive to realise the Atman within, as the goal of life, reject everything else and be in a state of continuous devotion to God.

"They swim the sea of births, the 'Monarch's' foot who gain;
None others reach the shore of Being's mighty main."

says Thirukkural.

Human birth has been granted to us by God only for this purpose. We should search and find out by what way, by what disciplines and with whose help we can escape from the chain of births. This is the gist of all that I have said above.

4. Jiva, Iswara, Jagat[1]

All-pervading One without a second

BRAHMAN is Sachidananda or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute. Just as light and heat (constitute the very nature of fire) and are one and the same in fire, similarly in that Absolute (which is impartite and homogeneous) every one of the three namely, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss exists as the other and they are identical.

Brahman (as Iswara wielding His power of Maya at His will) manifests Itself progressively, (through the stages of the Avyakta or Unmanifest. Mahattattwa or totality of jivas) as Ahamkara or the egoity (wherein the three gunas of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas become apparent) and as Jivas. (Jiva or the embodied soul is the reflection of Brahman or Pure Consciousness in the Rajas-predominant Prakrti called Avidya). Jiva is subject to the veiling power of Prakrti. (Tamoguna-predominant Prakrti projects itself as Jagat or multiplicity of phenomena at the will of Iswara to provide the embodied soul with the wherewithal of experience and enjoyment). The One Ultimate Principle has become (apparently) three which have been given these three names. The (Changeless and Eternal) Substratum is

[1] Translated from the Tamil work 'Jiva Iswara Jagat'.

Brahman, the Pure Consciousness. Jiva or the embodied soul, Iswara or the Omniscient Lord of Creation and Jagat or the phenomenal Universe are mere superimpositions on It. Thus the (Immutable) One (illusorily) appears as three.

Om Tat Sat

Om is Akhandakara Brahman. (It is the unbroken Continuum of Existence, Satta the summum genus which is present in all things. Om is (the highest symbol) indicative of Brahman both as Attributeless or Nirguna and as endowed with attributes or Saguna. Saguna Brahman is Brahman qualified by pure sattwa-predominant Maya, which is under Its control and is called Iswara (because He is all-powerful, the Lord of all, who is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe). 'Tat' is Jivatma or individualised soul. 'Sat' is the jagat or the universe. Jiva, Jagat and Para or Iswara, are the threefold superimpositions on the One Changeless Substratum of Brahman, which is Sakshat or immediate (and direct, as It is the Self that is within all.)

Avarana and Vikshepa

Self-knowledge is the goal of human life (as it bestows Bliss of Atman here and Immortality hereafter). Only those who have through supreme devotion developed an ever vigilant Viveka or discrimination between the Real and unreal are competent to enter the path of Self-knowledge.

The Infinite, Impartite, all-pervading, matchless, Supreme Being is the Light of all lights, by the light of consciousness of which all others shine. It is in the hearts of all. The layers of clouds are generated by the heat of the

Sun's rays. They are illumined by its light; but they alone appear in the sky, hiding the solar orb itself. Similarly through Maya's twin powers of veiling and projection, Avarana sakti and Vikshepa sakti, which have their origin in Brahman Itself, (as explained earlier), are manifested Jiva and Jagat. These products of Maya are illumined by the light of Atman. But these non-real and merely illusory manifestations veil the Reality of Atman and appear in Its place. Just as the clouds which shine only by the light of the Sun seem to be different from it, similarly due to the misapprehension caused by the projecting power, embodied and individualised soul or jivatman, which is really only reflection of Atman, appears to be different from It. The effulgence of Atman is hidden by the white cloud of Avarana (which causes non-apprehension) and dark rainbearing cloud of Vikshepa which projects the multiplicity of Jiva, Iswara, Jagat as superimpositions (leading to misapprehension).

Avidya, Kama and Karma

The innate tendency to forget the nature of Reality of Atman within (which is no other than Brahman, One without a second) and confound Its idendity with non-real and illusory projections of Jiva and Jagat is ignorance. It is due to it that, like the orb of the sun being obscured by the passing clouds, the effulgence of Atman which is Sachidananda Siva is hidden (by the non-self comprising of the body, senses and mind). This (mixing up of Real and the unreal and the consequent delusion prompting the mind to submit itself to a mistaken transference of their mutual properties and an everpersistent idea of 'I' and 'mine' in the body, organs etc., which are non-self) is the primary ignorance which is without beginning (for time

itself is an effect of it). It is the habitual nature of the embodied soul and is also called Prakrti. This Avidya is cast in the mould of the three gunas or modes of Nature, Sattwa or harmony, Rajas or activity and Tamas or inertia which are variable and are in a continual state of mutual impact. (Their interaction determines the character, disposition and actions of the natural man.) Subject to the pulls of the gunas, Jiva is tossed about between desire and aversion, (good action and bad deeds), merit and demerit which lead to the misery of endless cycle of birth and death.

In the Antahkarana or the inner organ or mindstuff, unceasingly thoughts arise and subside (when they are stored in Chitta as memories or latencies), one following the other, as also sankalpas or volitions and vikalpas or modes or fancies. (Jiva due to ignorance imagines himself to be an individual separative ego and sees the multiplicity around him as real.) On account of this nature of Jiva, sense objects present themselves to him in a fleeting manner and due to (the ego drive in the form of) desire and hatred, he engages himself in actions (in pursuit of them associated with the multiple factors of doer, instrument and result.) The results of such actions pursue him in the subsequent births also, in the form of fruit as merit or demerit, impressions and latent tendencies. (That is known as Vasana or residual tendency which makes for spontaneous recall of an object in the mind by previous intense thought of it and without reflection of its antecedent and consequent. Therefore vasanas are the seeds of desires in future lives, to be fulfilled in action. Thus the vicious circles are constituted — Avidya (ignorance), kama (desire) and karma (action); and kama, karma and vasana.)

Every thought by itself is a birth and its subsidence death. (So great is the power of the mind that it is the only cause that brings about man's bondage or Liberation).

If the natural, strong, beginning-less and obstinate vasana or tendency of the Jiva (as 'I am the doer', 'I am the enjoyer') is removed by constant inquiry and his mind merges in the contemplation of Siva Sachidananda, his transmigratory existence will be at an end. (as the root cause of Avidya which projects progressively desire and action will be destroyed. Such merging is attained by constant practice of looking upon everything, under all circumstances, always everywhere and in all respects as Brahman and Brahman alone.) It will be known in that constant contemplation that to lose sight of one's nature as Atman is ignorance and to stay in Its vision in constant Self-awareness is True Knowledge.

Grace of the Sadguru

When one, by such uninterrupted contemplation, discovers his essential Self-luminous nature as 'Atman', he will be steeped in Untrammelled Bliss, when all will be Unity of Plenary Existence and Consciousness. The beginningless Ignorance or Avidya can be dispelled, only when he is blessed with the Grace of the Sadguru. Just as when strong winds drive away the clouds, the Sun shines again in its own glory, similarly in that state of unitive Consciousness, the veiling of Ignorance will be dissolved and Self-effulgent Atman will shine by itself.

Atman, distinct from the Five Sheaths (Kosas), other than the Three Bodies (Sariras) witness of Three States ('Avasthas')

There are three states of experience of the Jiva viz., the waking, the dream and the deep sleep, corresponding to the three gunas or modes of Nature, namely Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas respectively. Nothing else exists apart from

that Infinite called Turiya the 'Fourth', which is the Eternal Witness of the waking state and the ego, identifying itself with it and the gross body (and appearing as the intellectual sheath), enjoying gross things by means of instruments of cognition such as sense organs; of the dream state and the ego identifying itself with it and the subtle body (and appearing as the intellectual sheath) enjoying the subject, object and their relationship created by Atman from the mindstuff and illumined by Its own effulgence; and, of the state of deep sleep sunk in which the ego remains dormant as the sheath of bliss or causal body, experiencing ignorance and bliss.

It is Turiya, the Eternal Self, a Consciousness in which there is no 'I' or 'mine'. It is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss Absolute. It is one's own nature or Swarupa which is Anandaghana or compacted Bliss (of supreme Reality). When one knows this and relates the three states to their Witness consciousness, by sublating them, the waking state will be resolved into dream; dream will be merged into deep sleep; and the deep sleep will be reduced to Turiya or Pure Consciousness. Thus the three bodies, gross, subtle and causal are also negated along with their respective three states of Consciousness and the three gunas or modes of Nature corresponding to them are also transcended; and one stays in his own true nature as Turiya or Atman.

When this Light of Turiya dawns at Its own time, the darkness of the beginning-less ignorance will disappear without leaving any traces of it. (Realising his true nature as Eternally Pure, Ever Englightened, Eternally Free and Existence Absolute) the illusion of Maya which is non-existent, as also the bondage caused by it will perish. With the complete destruction of ego sense as 'I' and 'mine', one will enjoy the ineffable peace (that passeth all understanding), when he is established in his true nature as

Sachidananda Siva. Those who know call this Unexcelled or Untrammelled Bliss and Self-Realisation. To stay established with the firm and unshakable conviction that his real nature is Existence, Consciousness, Bliss Absolute, after the veiling darkness of primeval Nescience has been dissolved by the grace of the Sadguru, who is verily the Supreme Being pervading the entire indivisible cosmos, ist he mark of a Jivanmukta or a man liberated even while alive. In this state, the Gnani (seeing everywhere the Non-dual Brahman and knowing that the ignorance of the other jivas is also not real and they are also ever liberated from the very beginning) considers all their illusory superimpositions due to Maya as mere shadows and appearances (and is not affected by them in the least).

Vision of the Lord

The clouds which are produced by the heat of the Sun's rays appear in the sky for a while, hide the Sun and disappear. One who sees the clouds as illumined only by the light of the Sun, is sure of the presence of the Sun. Similarly, when one knows that the entire world is a mere reflection which shines by the Light of the Pure Consciousness and hence the appearance of the phenomena has only the eternal and distinction-less Plenary Reality as its substrate and when that Knowledge becomes a conviction of consciousness, he is said to have the vision of Siva (Brahman). Such knowers of Truth affirm that the Effulgent Brahman, the causeless Cause is the only Reality, that all the illusory appearances which are projected from It, and their veiling It, constitute false knowledge or ignorance and that such appearances are also illumined by that Pure Consciousness only. To be deluded by the shadows that are cast by the light of Reality, to consider such unreal manifestations alone

as real and true and to cling to those illusory phenomena is Ignorance. When in the heart of the Jiva, who has during all his births till now mistaken the unreal for the Real, the light of Atman is seen, he attains a certitude in the depths of his consciousness that all external appearances are illusory and realises Atman alone as the Sole Reality and is steeped in Its Bliss. This is called Iswara Darshan or the vision of the Lord or Brahman. On seeing the light of True Knowledge, the illusion of Maya is destroyed and he stays as his own Self, the Atman and an embodiment of ineffable Love. This Love is God. For attaining this state, the Sadguru's instruction, initiation into the Truth and Grace are essential.

"Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art)

'Tat' or 'That' which is the Supreme Brahman (in the implied meaning of the word), also referred as Iswara, the Lord of the Universe (when describing it by Tatastha Lakshana or qualification *per accidens*) becomes 'Tvam' or 'thou', when It superimposes on Itself, Avidya or primeval Nescience. Universe, a mere illusory appearance caused by ignorance is the veil between Siva (Brahman) and Jiva (the embodied soul). (The superimposition masks the substratum). As stated earlier, when the cloud obscuring the Sun moves away, the Sun is immediately and directly seen. Similarly when one realises the full import of 'Asi' or 'Art' and consequently the identity of 'Tat' or 'That' and 'Tvam' or 'Thou' is intuited by him, (the Nescience will be dissolved and) the Self or Atman is seen shining eternally in Its own native splendour. When the threefold appearance of Jiva, Iswara and Jagat, to which Vedas also refer (in their theories of Creation) is related to their changeless and eternal Substratum, Brahman will be seen

as the only Reality without a second. Conviction will arise in the depths of one's consciousness that there is nothing else apart from It. When the Sadguru, the very embodiment of Grace grants this initiation into the Great Vedic pronouncement or Mahavakya of 'Tat Tvam Asi', the intimate experience will take place.

Longevity

"There are some who desire to know how one can increase the length of the span of his life. Self-realisation through knowledge of Atman has no connection whatsoever with living a phenomenally long life. The two are entirely different realms of pursuit."

"Inside the clock, there is a mechanism comprising of gear wheels and pinions. Similarly in our human body also, there are six chakras or centres of consciousness known as Muladhara, Svadhishtana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddha and Ajna which activate the vital airs or Pranas. The five main pranas comprise of the Prana and Apana which manifest as incoming and outgoing breaths and others viz., Samana, Udana and Vyana are essential to our life. Akin to the mainspring in the clock is the mind activating the Prana and Apana which are similar to the two hands of the clock, indicating passage of time. The conjoined action of the mind and the pranas measure the running out of the hour glass of our life."

"Mind and prana arise from the same source and hence they function together. When one of them is controlled, the other also gets controlled. Therefore when the mind gets quiescent through Dhyana yoga or meditation, the incoming and outgoing breaths are also slowed down. When the mind and prana are quietened together in this

manner, life energies are conserved. Gnanis who are adepts in such control (of mind and prana) through Dyana yoga or meditation, can attain longevity. The ideal age for practice or this technique is between eighteen and twenty-four. Endeavour between twenty four and thirty-six years of age will yield average results. Practice after the age of thirty-six will be useful only in neutralising the effects of past actions or karma. When their merit (punya) and demerit (papa) balance each other and when Sadguru blesses them with his Grace, they will be enabled to practise contemplation or devotion to knowledge. In this type of practice of meditation and Samadhi through Self-enquiry, when the mind falls quiet, prana will also merge with it. But it cannot yield the other result of lengthening the span of life."

Samadhi

"When the mind and prana, becoming one, merge into Buddhi and through it in the 'Chidakasa' or 'knowledge space' in the heart, then the state is called samadhi, when one will not be conscious of his body, hunger and other perceptions. Such inner absorption in which mentation or mode of mind as subject object relationship is still present is called Savikalpa samadhi. When the 'I' or ego consciousness is totally lost, and it becomes modeless awareness of Self in Self, that state of Contentless Consciousness is known as Nirvikalpa Samadhi. This can be attained only after assiduous practice in many lives. However the latent and residual impressions or samskaras of the practice of this discipline in the past births, if present, will be evident to the aspirants themselves."

"There is an old adage (in Tamil) that one should

cultivate in the proper season. Similarly, when a jiva, who after being caught up in the whirl of samsara through countless births, has at last overcome the effect of his sins by good deeds and as a result of his accumulated punya or merit, he comes into contact with a Sadguru, he should seek his constant company, devote himself to his loving service and beg for his Grace. When the Master casts his benevolent look and showers his Grace on him, he is blessed with absorption of mind and prana in the contemplation of Brahman, longevity, freedom from ailments and robust health. When he attains them, he overcomes the separative consciousness of ego or jiva and in the Unitive Consciousness, beholds (the Self in all beings and) all beings in the Self. All distinctions and diversity disappear. Duality vanishes without leaving any trace of it and he is led to the highest awareness of Non-duality that all is verily Brahman."

"If one is to obtain the Grace of Sadguru, one should show compassion to all creatures. With the cultivation of compassion, his love of God increases. When his heart gets filled with intense love of God, the desires (for fleeting objects of senses) and attachments (to his son, wife, house etc.) will be overcome. This leads (through the development of Viveka or discrimination between the Real and the unreal) to Vairagya or dispassion, (which is renunciation of enjoyments of fruits of one's actions here and hereafter and cultivation of six virtues like control of mind etc., and also deep yearning for Liberation). When, equipped with these prerequisites, (he takes to the pursuit of the knowledge of Self), his primeval ignorance is destroyed and he gets established in the unexcelled and ineffable Bliss of Atman which is Pure Consciousness, when all his sorrows cease. Sadguru comes into his life as the embodi-

ment of Divine con.passion, showers his boundless Grace, grants him only that Supreme Bliss of his true nature which is Atman and establishes him in the distinctionless happiness of nondifference."

Salutation unto Sadguru Maharaj!

5. The Goal of Life[1]

RARE indeed is the human birth. Having attained it, one should know its goal and reach it. Our ancient seers and sages have shown us the path. They have revealed to us that realisation of the Supreme One, the Father of the universe is the Purushartha or the prime aim of human life.

There are three different paths for achieving it. First is Bhakti, to stand clinging to God. Next is the path of Yoga of desireless action which leads to Bhakti. Third comes Gnana, culmination of the pursuit along the path of desireless action and clinging to Him — in being one with Him in Bliss. Each of them again follows three courses determined by three Gunas or modes of Prakriti or Nature.

In Bhakti, Para Bhakti or higher Bhakti is considered the noblest; in Yoga, Para Yoga or higher Yoga is the best; untrammelled Bliss in the Self is the great height of Gnana or Knowledge.

By Bhakti is meant the clinging to the Supreme One, giving up all attachments to the body, life and worldly objects. Shining as the inner light of consciousness in all beings and illuminating all the phenomenal universe, the Supreme Lord is its One Support and Power behind it. To stand clinging to Him, knowing Him and seeing Him as

[1] Translated from the Tamil work 'Piravi Payan'.

immanent in and fully pervading all beings, like ghee in milk, fire and heat in wood, oil in sesame is called Para Bhakti or higher Bhakti. Outer and external bhakti or devotion is evidenced in nine well-known forms such as hearing, singing, and constant remembrance of Lord's names, forms and glories, service to all living beings seeing Him in all, image-worship, prostration, devotion as a servant, love as a friend and surrender to Him of one's all from his body to the soul.

To those who have climbed to the height of Para Bhakti, the Supreme reveals Itself by Itself and this phase is known as Para Yoga or higher Yoga.

Three are the stages in Yoga, Sthoola or gross physical, Sukshma or subtle and Karana or causal. Sthoola Yoga is effected by the visible parts of the being with a view to cultivate the physical instruments and make the aspirant fit for the next stage of subtle Yoga. The phase in which the mastery over all the parts of the gross body, the vital and subtle instruments and above all, the mind is gained is known as Sukshma Yoga.

Karana Sarira or the causal body is Avidya or Ignorance from which are produced the subtle and gross bodies. When the three aspects of ego identifying themselves with the triple bodies of gross, subtle and causal and the respective States of waking, dream and deep sleep get merged in the Witness Consciousness, the jivahood is overcome. This is the final stage called Karana Yoga. It is then the state of universal mental mode and awareness. That is when all the distinctive knowledge adhering to the subjective and the objective gets merged in the Self. Now, it alone shines as the awareness of the mental mode in Self or perpetual awareness. He who has attained this Atmakara Mano Vritti Gnana or Akhandakara Gnana is called Jivan-mukta. This also loses itself in its source which is Pure Consciousness, when he is drowned and dissolved in an Ocean of Bliss and is unaware of anything apart. Now, he is called Videhamukta.

Movement as waves, colour and taste are seen together as the three characteristics of water. Similarly, Absolute Existence or Sat, Absolute Consciousness or Chit and Absolute Bliss or Ananda, corresponding to the waves, colour and taste of the water respectively are the natural characteristics of the Pure Consciousness. Those who have reached and become this Sat Chit Ananda, which is by nature Matchless or Unexcelled Bliss are called Videhamuktas. This fully liberated sage is free from three Gunas, from Prakriti or causal matter which is the basis of Gunas, the phenomenal world, gross vision, the limited jivahood and the three bodies. The effects of his Karmas, past, present and future are snapped.

Jivanmuktas are of three kinds. "Sadhaka" is one who is practising Akhandakara Gnana. "Dridha Prajna" is the second category when he is well established in it. One who has gone beyond that stage and become a Videhamukta, is called "Aroodha".

Universal Consciousness manifests when the finite individual Jiva merges with the Universal. This Universal Consciousness with physical, subtle and causal adjuncts give Chit, Tattwa and Maunakshara respectively, which again when merged one into the next successively, lead to Paramakshara or Brahmakara. This is what is indicated by Lord Krishna to Arjuna as "Aksharam Paramam Brahma". The Kshara or the Mutable is dissolved in the Akshara or the Immutable, which in turn is merged in the Transcendental Reality. This is called "Videha Kaivalya". Saint Thayumanavar says "When one is That, That shall tell what That is." Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi also says "Absorption into the Source

or Core of Existence is Karma and Bhakti and that is also Yoga and Gnana."

There are many systems of Yoga. Eight steps of Raja Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga) disciplining the gross and subtle bodies, aims at the merging of the mind in the Self. Other systems such as Vasi Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Prana Yoga, Hamsa Yoga are all directed towards Manolaya or absorption of the mind. To make the extrovert mind turn inward and get it merged at its source is the aim of all Yogas. This is seen in Patanjali's aphorism "Yogas-chittavritti-nirodhah." Lord Krishna advises Arjuna "The mind wanders hither and thither. Restrain it then and there, draw it inward and fix it in the Self." That is Yoga.

Saint Thayumanavar sings in ecstasy:

"There the thought (mind) was born and there the thought (mind) died and rose purer. All states exist there. There the duality of experiencing ego and Witnessing Self is transcended."

With the practice of Manolaya, the mind is brought under the control of the aspirant. Although the mind may be absorbed in the state of Manolaya, unless and until it is completely annihilated, the submerged mind will get revived again due to past Karma i.e., Prarabdha. When the mind is totally extinguished, he reaches the stage of Turiyatita, when one is Brahma Variyan or Varishta. It is said of him "Varishta is one whose state cannot be gauged by others." They are ever established in their own Self, Effulgence and Bliss. All their Karmas, past, present and future are burnt to ashes. As stated earlier, there is no more bondage for him, of the three bodies, gross, subtle and causal. Such ones, liberated while yet alive are not born again. With the causal body, prakriti is also destroyed and with it the three Gunas. Then, the Atman is in its natural splendour of the Infinite Sat Chit Ananda.

6. Sayings of the Swami[1]

A person who wishes to scale the summit must indeed climb his way up step by step. Gnana or Self-realization is the final culmination of yoga and is not independent of it.

* * *

One is bewildered by the variety of goods that are spread out for sale in a market. A man must decide what he ought to buy from the market and acquire the means for buying it. In the art of living, a man must first choose his goal and set about to reach it.

* * *

Even as a farmer who wants to reap a rich harvest must toil hard, plough the hard soil, make it soft before the seeds are sown, protect the young crops from extraneous growth of weeds and keep off the cattle, a spiritual seeker who aspires to the summum bonum of life — God-realization — must seek the company of God's chosen seers, listen carefully to their advice and tread the path shown by them. There is no short-cut to Self-realization.

[1] Translated from "Gnana Inba Veli".

It is difficult to conceive the reality of the Atma in the consciousness of one's mind even as it is to see a shadow in a dream state.

* * *

A man cannot become rich overnight. It is only by ceaseless efforts over the years that he can save up money which will make him rich. Even so, a spiritual aspirant must struggle hard and unremittingly to attain to the highest abode of the Kingdom of God. One must set sail when the wind is favourable.

If one were to ask how long should one engage in sadhana, the answer is through as many human lives as have gone by in unrelieved ignorance of the reality of Being. But with this difference, that these lives are fashioned in a way which is conducive to a divine life which comes about by cleansing oneself of the three impurities and living beyond the clutches of the two pronged karma. In this state which lasts through countless lives, a sadhaka would be the recipient of divine Grace and in course of time realize his real nature and attain eternal bliss.

Sri Thandavaraya Swami says that it takes as many years of practice of living in an inward looking state, as one has lived in an outward looking state.

To the degree that you turn away from attachments to the unreal your inner vision of Reality develops. If by a steady practice of this kind the mind comes under control and becomes aware as consciousness — Self — you can abide as the Ocean of Bliss though living in the bitter body.

* * *

The effulgence and glory of the sun is hidden from a blind man. Identifying the body with the soul leads to

spiritual blindness and shuts one's vision from the radiance of the soul.

* * *

It is not possible to separate the shell, flesh and the seed of an unripe tamarind. But when it is ripe, the flesh can be easily separated from the shell and the seed from the flesh. This phenomenon underscores an essential truth in that to those who are afflicted by agnana, the body and the atma appear to be one; but when they gain true knowledge or gnana they would realize that they are not the body but the Self-within and thereby live in eternal bliss.

* * *

Take a coconut. This is covered by dense coir strands and a hard shell. If you remove the coir strands and break the shell you witness a white limitless space. The enjoyment you feel in the limitless is akin to breaking a coconut. If you remove the dense coir which may be likened to Maya and intuit the Reality enclosed by the shell (the body), you will witness the Atma Swarupa (the Reality) and rejoice in it.

Camphor when lighted casts a radiance all around but is itself consumed completely leaving no trace of it behind. Even so, is the nature of the mind which witnesses the effulgence spreading before it. To actualise the effulgence is gnana.

* * *

A man caught in a great flood would either like to reach the banks or swim along with the swift current. If he tries to stand still in the midst of the flood, people will think he is out of his mind. Even so, one must have a goal in life to the

attainment of which one must strive. There are three impurities attaching to a man's life. These have their source in the body, world and the life principle. That which attaches to the body is 'Kama', while that which attaches to the world is 'Maya' and the third which attaches to the life principle is 'Ahankara'. One must cleanse onself of these impurities. This is the chief merit in human life.

* * *

Unalloyed gold is recovered from the dross with which it is mixed by repeatedly melting it in a crucible.

* * *

One who wants to see God must be patient, loving, tender of heart, practise charity, think lofty thoughts, cease making disparaging remarks about others, be of loving service to the Guru and give oneself to Atma Vichara.

* * *

Lust and anger are insuperable impediments to spiritual realization and afflict a spiritual seeker as leprosy, the body. Those who have fallen a prey to the twin unmitigated evils are legion.

* * *

Many people think that to perform tapas one must wear a saffron robe and retire to a forest and subsist there on fruits and leaves of trees. But tapas can also be encompassed by holding steadfast, in the midst of pain and suffering and by protecting all sentient beings from harm.

* * *

Pain and insult only touch the body and not the life within. The swarupa of life is Brahmanandam. Even as the vast sky is not caught up in the swirling dust below, we are not touched by pain or insult.

* * *

The rose is beautiful, fragrant and very soft to the touch. Every one is fond of a rose because of the qualities it possesses. But the rose itself is surrounded by thorns. Even as one plucks the rose by carefully removing the thorns, one must learn to meet the trials and tribulations of the earthly existence with patience, and worship God with unflagging faith and conviction.

* * *

We should do our duty with an inner conviction that we are only instruments and not the doer nor the person who induces another to act.

Do not delude yourself into thinking that you are the doer. We must firmly believe that we in the world are the instruments of the Lord. It is only after taking many births that the Jiva which turns into pure gold by sadhana, comprehends its real nature and the truth that the universe is a phantasm. It is only when a child gains admission to a class in a school that it can progress towards graduation. Even if he abandons school in the middle, he can resume study at any time. This is what is conveyed by the phrase in the Gita "Yoga brashtah Abhijayate — (Chapter 6, verse 41"). The sage Suka, prays of the Lord, "Lord, please grant that I always remember you wherever I may be born". When he took birth again he was born as Saint Kabir. Jeevan Muktas are born in this world for Loka Sangraha, to redeem humanity.

Indeed, the player, the thing played upon and the play itself are nothing but God. Seek to efface the sense of 'I' and 'Mine'. It is only then you will realise God's true nature and reside in happiness.

* * *

One should live in silence without any desires, without thoughts and without any will of one's own.

* * *

So long as there are 'vasanas', the sense of attachment to the body will persist. 'Vasana' is like an old creditor. So long as we do not declare ourselves insolvent, we shall be afraid of the creditor who will pursue us. When once we come to realize that there is nothing that we need and so become non-attached, we are truly 'insolvent' of worldliness and the vasanas will then desert us and cease to afflict us. It is difficult to jettison the vasanas that cling to one but with ceaseless practice, one can reach Vasanakshaya.

* * *

Parvati the consort of Lord Siva, begged of her Lord to build a house for her on the snowy heights of Kailasa, the abode of Lord Siva.

He remonstrated with her that she was not destined to own a house. However, when Parvati persisted in her request, the Lord bade the celestial carpenter to build one. On an auspicious day there was the usual grahapravesam to which all were invited. After the celebrations were over and everyone had taken leave after each one was honoured according to his deserts, Ravana who had come to attend the celebrations still tarried behind to ask of the Lord what he had in mind to ask. When the Lord looked around to

see whether there was anyone still left to be honoured, He saw Ravana who came forward and requested the Lord to gift him the house that had been built.

The Lord turned to Parvati and exclaimed "Did I not tell you that you were not destined to own a house?" So saying He gifted the house to Ravana and returned to the snowy Kailas. One cannot avoid one's destiny.

Parvati was grief-stricken that she could not live even for a few days in the house Her husband had built for Her. Lo! this thought was the reason why she was born as Sita. Ravana knew the Avatara rahasya of Sita, and so he wanted to make Sita stay in the house for a few days. So he brought Sita to Lanka but Sita stayed in the Asoka Grove there, steeped in sorrow. It is the thought, the Sankalpa, that causes birth.

When Sita Devi came to realize that she was really Parvati and had only been brought to Lanka because of Her desire for a house, she was rescued by Lord Rama and both returned to Ayodhya.

Lord Siva who had taken birth as Rama, made Nandi, the bull, to be born as Hanuman and be of service to Him. So, indeed it was that Hanuman was steeped in Bhakthi for Sri Rama. This version you will not find in any book. This is Antharanga Ramayana.

Sri Rama is the Atma, the Manas is his consort Sri Sita. This manas was kidnapped by Ravana, and Sita had to leave the beautiful Ayodhya behind and go to Lanka. Sri Rama rescued Sita from Lanka and took her to Ayodhya and was crowned king there. This is the story of Atma Rama. This Atma Rama resides always in our inner most being.

* * *

Those who are after superhuman siddhis, use the Kundalini sakthi which is activated by pranayama, to attain these siddhis. Those who have realised that Siddhis or occult powers are obstacles to spiritual realization and have thus renounced all desire for such siddhis, practice Pranayama for actualising Jeevatma Paramatma Aikya Bhava.

* * *

God pervades the whole creation. He is the witness and treats everything alike. To know Him, one must have a pure mind. A pure mind purifies the lotus of the heart and gives birth to Gnana.

* * *

The mind is a monkey. Even if a monkey is given all the fruits and eatables, it will jump from one place to another.

* * *

A devotee asks the Swami: "How is one to attain peace of mind?".

The feeling of contentment is a very valuable possession. In keeping with a Tamil saying which conveys the idea that one should feel over-joyed, by considering even the little one has, as an endowment of immense fortune, one must free oneself of all desires. It will be useful to recall continually to the mind the Tirumantiram verse which says that even if one is with God (who is the bestower of all riches), one should be without desire.

By practising right food habits, by undertaking fasts and vratas, one will be able to control desire even if it is only for a time. These practices will not only enure to one's good physically, but also to the good of the heart; thus

gradually leading one to conquer desire. In the state of desirelessness one will experience that one has transcended the feeling of Jiva-bheda, Jada-bheda and Iswara-bheda. One will then reach a stage of realization of oneness with all sentient beings, and be able to see God within oneself and in all God's creations. The sadhaka's inner vision will then open and he will reside in Shanti. Those who come in contact with such a sadhaka will also be benefitted by the peace emanating from his presence. It is the quality of Shantam that attracts like a magnet, the Divine.

* * *

Since Lord Krishna declares in the Gita (Chapter X) that "Among the Indriyas, I am the mind", it is clear that Lord Krishna dwells in the mind. The highly poisonous cobra is called "Nalla Pambu" in Tamil which translated literally is "good snake". There is an esoteric significance in the fact that the Lord who is all good, dwells in the mind which is vicious.

* * *

Even as a bullock which refuses to be tethered to a cart, is forced, by stages, to submit to the discipline, the mind must be disciplined daily and in stages to devote itself to the attainment of the summum bonum of life. Very soon it will dwell in it. Lord Krishna refers to this in the Gita (Chapter VI). If the mind which wanders abroad in search of sense enjoyments begins to savour a little of the peace and joy which dwell in one's heart, it will by itself return and seek the life's goal.

* * *

When there is an increase in oxygen, the fire which feeds

on it burns with redoubled vigour. This example will serve to illustrate the fact that it is the thought rising in the mind that fans hate, desire and ego-consciousness. By pursuing the thoughts to their source and annihilating them (by means of a steadfast determination to root out all thoughts which are anatma in nature) and engaging in dhyana, the darkness within oneself will give place to light.

* * *

A devotee asked the Swami "How is the mind to be brought under control?". To this question the Swami answers: 'Suppose I ask you to go round the temple holding a cup brimming with oil and hand the same over to me on return, and I adjure you that you will be victorious if you do not spill the oil, you will find that your thoughts are all directed to seeing that the oil does not spill. Think that the cup is your mind and the oil it holds are the thoughts. Just as you ensure that the oil does not spill, you must see to it that your thoughts do not wander. After ensuring this you must engage yourself in dhyana. If you do this you will succeed. You must not abandon your dhyana in the middle even to attend to an important work.'

* * *

There are many ways in which the mind can be controlled and quietened. One way is Vairagya which connotes a state where you cease to be attracted by the material and sense allurements of this world and the upper worlds. God is real and eternal and all the others, ontollogically speaking, (such as the mind, buddhi, indriyas, body and the phenominal world) are unreal and evanescent. This truth can be realised by an enquiry into their imperfections.

Once you realize this truth, you will not be attracted towards things that ceaselessly run and never reach a meaning.

* * *

One may ask whether control of breath is necessary. Retaining the breath within the heart in a proper way is called 'Pranayama'. The mind can be controlled only so long as breath is retained. If one controls the mind by inquiry, then breath will also be controlled. It is the control of the mind which is called dhyana.

* * *

A devotee asks "If the vision of the two eyes is focussed on to the middle region between the two eye brows, this causes pain to the eye. What is to be done?"

Focussing the vision of the two corporal eyes between the two eye brows, and the incorporal eye on knowledge, and fixing your attention on your goal, is called dhyana. Unless there is such an integration, mere focussing the eyes between the eye-brows will only cause pain to the eyes. Until a perfect integration is achieved, you should do the exercise only for a short time and return to it. The time you engage yourself in this exercise should be slowly increased. If you practise it as suggested, you will not experience any pain.

* * *

One must still one's mind. When a blinding storm rages ,some branches of a tree may break and the fruits fall before their time. But the tree itself stands resolute braving the storm. Even so, we must not feel dispirited when difficulties overtake us. We must brave the storm of life.

* * *

When Arjuna confesses to Lord Krishna that he is unable to still his mind, the Lord tells him that by practising control of the mind continually, and with a steadfastness of purpose, the mind could be made quiescent. He tells Arjuna not to despair but practise it continually with Vairagya discarding the Jiva-bheda and in full realisation that everything is soaked in Brahman, and assures him that it can be achieved.

We must always keep in mind the goal underscored by the words "Whatever work one is engaged in, whatever misery one is subject to, a Jivanmuktha rest his mind in eternal silence". Jiva-brahma Aikyam is the same as Brahma Samadhi. This can be achieved by Bhakthi as also by the ajapa of Soham.

* * *

How is one to be in a state of quiesence? This is accomplished by resting your mind and controlling the thoughts that well up in your mind. Whatever others may say, remain unconcerned, as you would in a state of sleep. Forget the past and don't think of the morrow. Do everything enjoined on you, without postponing it and forget it all as though it were a dream. Do not hanker after things, do not think nor recall to your mind anything; reside always in this state. Do not think of what you need today nor what you may need tomorrow. Annihilate your thoughts as a spendthrift would fritter away his wealth.

Man is a marionette activated by the two strings — of causality arising from good and bad deeds. If these two are quietened, the movement stops. If you break the chain of causality even as the links are being forged on the anvil of life, the Atma will become one with Brahman.

* * *

In the pantheon of sixty three Saivaite Saints, there was one named Sakkia Nayanar. He used to stand in front of a temple and throw stones on the Linga installed there. (Even by so doing he attained Mukthi). Even the stones appeared to him as fragrant flowers. To stitch a piece of cloth into a garment, one must have thread, a needle and a sewing machine. A spiritual aspirant who seeks to attach himself to God must possess the right manas, the word of God and his hands. These are called the Thrikaranas of mind, speech and body. The mind must melt with love thinking of the Lord, He must be spoken as the word of God and getting absorbed in that feeling of devotion, the hand must offer flowers of worship to Him.

* * *

It is said that celestial beings rob one of 'Mantra Sadhanas'. It is therefore necessary that one fortifies oneself against these, before one begins to perform japa. Even as cotton is transformed into yarn and ultimately into cloth, one should integrate the mind, speech and action. There are two kinds of mantras, one which confers all ephemeral benefits that one may seek, and the other which is itself the 'Summum bonum'.

Mandukya Upanishad says that the sound 'Omkara' is sustained by itself in a timeless continuum.

There is in man an unmistakable luminosity. We must actualise it, praise it and with its aid encompass sadhana, become the recipient of God's love and attain to the highest abode 'Moksha'.

* * *

There is no need for Tantras, Yantras or Mantras. What is needed is inner bhakthi. Only this is puissant.

Do not dissipate your thoughts on speculation. Live with a conviction that there is a God above. Do not speak ill of the elders.

* * *

To one who is steeped in Bhakthi, the world and its teeming life appear as God Himself in His Infinite forms. To him all happenings in the world appear as the sport of the Lord.

* * *

Referring to Pujas being performed at the temples the Swami writes thus: Asthikas, (believers) should conduct themselves according to the tenets of the Sruti, Smriti, Agama and the Vedas. Everything else is just make-believe any hypocrisy. We do not want ostentatious pujas; what we want is the Lord's Grace.

* * *

Sastras declare that by performing, in an attitude of faith, sraddha for our forbears, the pitru-devatas become satisfied and confer their belssings on us. But the so called advanced scientists' do not agree. However, Gnanis and Siddhas declare that what the Sastras proclaim is true. The dhurbiksham (hard times) we witness in our country is due to our not performing Sraddha properly. It is necessary to perform Sraddha to take care of our temporal and eternal good. If we fail to do it, there is an atonement. The Sastras have laid down that it is enough if Mahalaya Sraddha is performed without fail. Let us therefore do this properly so that we may be able to remove sufferings from our midst and usher in prosperity.

* * *

Even as some fruits look deceptively red and succulent but taste very sour, there are some who have read Vedanta, posing as though they know everything and even making bold to instruct others. In actual fact, they know nothing. One's heart must melt in the very thought of God and His Grace.

* * *

To attain Divine Grace, meditation is more important than prodigious learning. Yearning is more important than skill in discussion; tears flowing from eyes are more important than verses recited by the tongue and worship is more beneficial than research into books.

* * *

We celebrate Navaratri festival to invoke the grace of Ambika Parasakthi who takes on nine different forms on the nine days and ascends the Simhasana and spreads prosperity and well-being all around. On the Vijayadasami day, we celebrate the victory of the Ambika over the Asura.

In the same way, there are nine passages in every human body. It is only the efflorescence of the Sakthi as navasakthis, that make these passages function in a human body, and also make them work. Even if one is defective, man is thereby affected. Man can be healthy only when these faculties function well.

* * *

Worshipping the Lord in His manifested form within one's heart will efface all thoughts welling up in one's mind.

* * *

You should first integrate your mind, word and thought, make it one-pointed and visualise your Ishta-Devata as standing before you. Having done this, you should perform japa by repeating the mantra which signifies the particular Devata. It is advisable to do this in solitude in a room.

* * *

Some people will say that God resides within ourselves. Though a cow is full of milk, it is only from its udder that we get milk. Even so, if we have before us a form of God for daily worship and impress the form within our hearts, we could direct our thoughts to the form and from thence, come to realise God.

* * *

It is impossible to conclude whether the Sakara characteristic of the Lord is superior or His Nirakara characteristic. Lord Krishna extols both these in the Gita. It is difficult to think of a formless Reality, as the mind naturally associates itself with forms. The formless is contained in the form and the form in the formless. It is only by devotion to the Reality with the Form that one may transcend the latter. Though a student enters school with the object of graduating from it he can only start from the Standard I. In stages he will be promoted to the final class.

* * *

Ramalinga Swamigal (a great Saint) used to reside in Vadalur in a Reddiar's house. A lamp used to burn always in the room in which the Swami stayed. Oil for the lamp used to be kept in a vessel. One day the Reddiar who had to go out of the village, gave instructions to his son to place a vesselful of water for the Swami's ablutions and fill up

with oil the vessel used for keeping oil. The boy, not recognising the vessel used for keeping oil poured water into that vessel and placed another vessel, filled with oil.

The Swami did not notice that the vessel usually containing oil for the lamp was filled up with water and poured the water from this vessel to keep the lamp burning. The lamp kept on burning throughout the night even with water. On the next day, the Reddiar came back and noticed that the vessel containing the oil was full and asked the Swami whether the lamp was burning throughout the previous night. The Swami who replied in the affirmative soon realized that the Lord had transmuted water into oil to make His Bhakta's belief true.

Just as when we call someone by his name he hastens to us leaving everything behind, the Lord will also come running to our succour if we devoutly pray to Him.

* * *

It is only the sweetness of the sugar lump that matters and not its shape. Even so, the form in which we worship God is of no consequence but only the eternal principle of sweetness of the Lord permeating the form, which we ought to recognise.

* * *

A log of wood conjures up different things to different people. To a housewife it is firewood, to a carpenter it is an article of furniture, to a sculptor a beautiful image. It is the principle of the wood that permeates the mind's eye in all these cases. Likewise, it is the immanent transcendental principle of the Atma Swarupa that permeates the phenomena of the world. It is to this truth that one must, with the grace of the Guru, turn.

* * *

The Universe is sustained by the twin eternal principles, viz. Sivàm and Sakthi. The sun is Sivam, and its effulgent and puissant rays are the Sakthi. It is the rays of the Sun that descend and scatter light and warmth on the cold earth below. The Sun in its majesty stands aloof in the celestial sky. Sivam is like cotton and cloth the Sakthi. There is no cloth without cotton. It is only cloth that is useful to people. Cotton by itself is of no use. Cotton by itself does not clothe the body. Transported into a different key, Sivam and Sakthi are Love and Grace.

The Parabrahma Swarupam is the embodiment of Love. The grace that is of Sakthi manifests itself as Prakriti in the efflorescence of the world we see around us.

* * *

Sweetness is inseparable from sugar. Those who have unburdened their cares at the feet of the Lord, live and have their being in the Lord. It is only by clinging to the Lord's feet that one can cross the ocean of samsara. Let us cling to the feet of Lord Siva who kicked Yama.

* * *

An elephant has two sets of teeth; only one is visible to the outside world namely, its tusks. Even so, though Avatara Purushas like Lord Krishna have assumed the human form and appear to be intensely human, are beyond the reach of the enticement of karma and reside in eternal beatitude.

Though a lamp sheds its soft light all around, the space underneath the lamp itself is in darkenss. As the saying goes, nearer to the temple farther away from God. Even so those who are very near to an Avatara Purusha, do not really know him for what he is, whereas, others in far off

places who are enveloped by the radiance issuing out of his soul recognise his greatness and gratefully acknowledge his help.

* * *

Once Sri Sankaracharya was afflicted by a terrible malady caused by black magic. His Guru Sri Govinda Bhagavat Pada advised him to go to Tiruchendur and pray to Lord Subramanya, who he said would cure him of the disease. Sri Sankaracharya accordingly went there, and while praying to the Lord saw a serpent with a raised hood at the feet of the Lord. The Acharya at once realized that it was his own Guru, an Avatara of Adisesha, who had appeared there as a serpent to intercede on his behalf to the Lord. The Acharya sang in praise of the Lord in a metre popularly known as 'Bhujangam' which is suggestive of the movement of a snake.

This stotram of the merciful Acharya is a great treasure given to us. Those who recite these verses daily will be rid of all diseases and acquire riches and peace, be blessed with a long life, and in the end be delivered from rebirth. This is our conviction.

* * *

It is said that knowledge is of six different kinds. True knowledge which is the seventh transcends the other six. It is transcendental knowledge which perceives the other six. In short it is the knowledge of God. One can attain this knowledge only with the Guru's Grace.

* * *

One may ask why a Guru? One is apt to think that by reading spiritual texts one may realize God. Even if the

Lord Narayana appears in person with the conch, disc, sankha and Gada in His hands, a person who is steeped in ignorance and material vasanas is apt to think that it is a play and designed to cheat him. Duryodhana, who witnessed the Lord's Viswarupa, is a classic example.

* * *

A preceptor who confounds spiritualism with occultism indeed misses the incomparable sweetness of the former and is like a goat which devours the sugar-cane leaves and leaves the sugar-cane behind. A real spiritual preceptor who has dwelved deep into the esoteric message of the Mahavakyas and lovingly imparts it to his disciples is like an elephant which gobbles up the sugar-cane and ignores the sugar-cane leaves and bids its young to do likewise.

* * *

A Jivanmukta who finds himself in the midst of teeming life and the world's allurements does not partake of it but lives apart from it as he is totally indifferent to their blandishments even as butter which has been churned out of butter-milk does not mix with it or dissolve in it but floats on top of it.

* * *

From the standpoint of a Gnani, life is mostly a shadow play. Do not fall a prey to worldly riches. Love all sentient beings as manifestations of the Lord.

* * *

A person who transcends the three gunas performs actions without cupidity, hatred or anger. He does not

pause to cogitate what the results of his actions are. He will only consider his actions as his duty. Lord Krishna has pointed out in different parts of the Gita, this stage of man's spiritual development:

"The Vedas deal with the three Gunas. Be thou free, O Arjuna, from the triad of the Gunas, free from the pairs of opposites, ever-balanced, free from (the anxieties regarding) acquisition and preservation and established in the Self". (Ch. 2, verse 45).

* * *

The Swami's reply to an invitation: The Swami commends your thoughtful invitation to him for his birth-day celebrations (Thai Krithikai). However, the Swami is surprised at your thought that he is not present at the place you have invited him to come. Those who truly and sincerely love him, will readily realize that he is present there, here and everywhere.

* * *

A pair of sandals offers complete protection to the feet of a traveller, from brambles and thorns that lie strewn on his path. An umbrella protects him from the torrid heat of the noon-day sun. It is not necessary to spread a carpet of leather or erect a canopy covering the whole sky to achieve these purposes.

Even so, the Guru's Upadesa and spiritual instructions protect and insulate a true devotee who wishes to tread the spiritual path, from the onslaughts of conflicting doctrines and philosophies.

* * *

The word denoting religion in Tamil means path. All

religions are essentially the same. You must therefore follow the tenets of your religion. The final conclusion of all religions is that we should realize the highest good by the best means.

Although we may reach the destination by any path (both the path strewn with brambles and the other a high road), yet our religion leads us on the high road to the destination. In other words, this is Swadharma. The path strewn with brambles is the other (Para-dharma). We must therefore follow the tenets of our religion.

* * *

A hotelier prepares dosais, iddlies etc. from the same rice paste.

Even as a sweetmeat vendor prepares delicacies of differing shapes and hues from the same ingredients, viz. sugar and flour, and serves the same to each of his customers according to his taste, the world religions prolcaim the same Truth which is one and indivisible.

* * *

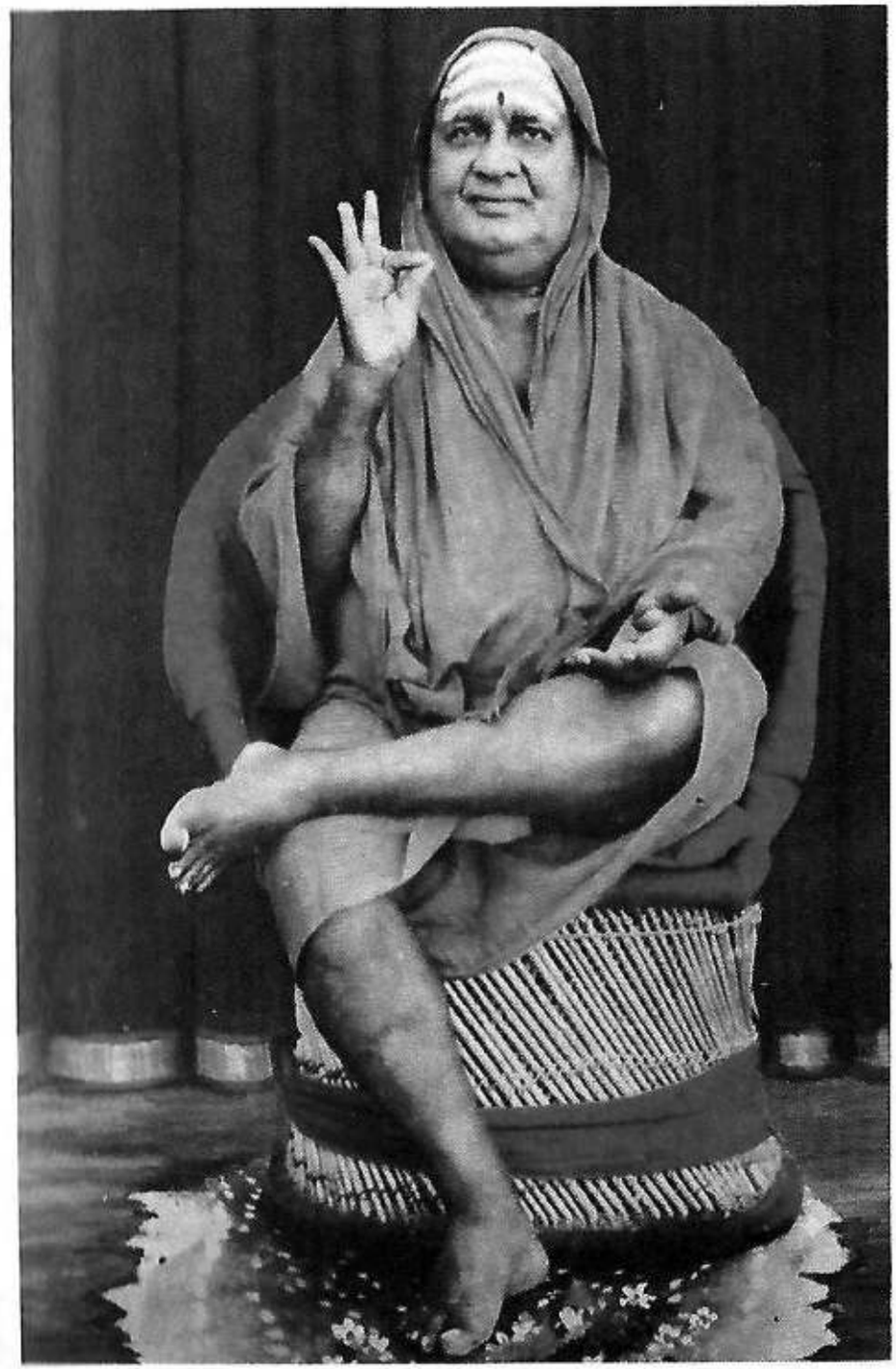
The one becomes two and more and causes confusion. Even if there are differing points of view in Advaita, Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita, you must realize that the primal power which informs all, is One. All Gnanis belong to the same persuasion.

* * *

A milkmaid comes along the road carrying on her head the milkpot brimming and frothing with milk. She walks with laughter in her eyes, without a care in the world and a passerby stands stupefied to see her walking along with a

pot full of milk with such easy abandon and lilting gait as if she did not carry the precious burden on her head. The truth is that the milkmaid's attention is rivetted on her milk pot and she would not by any chance, let it slip. Even so, a Gnani who is immersed in Sahaja Samadhi, lives in God though outwardly he lives in the tantalising world.

APPENDIX



1. Ten Precepts of Sri Gnanananda

1.	Be kind	But be not slavish.
2.	Show pity	But be not deceived.
3.	Render charity	But be not reduced to penury.
4.	Be thrifty	But be not miserly.
5.	Be active	But be not hasty.
6.	Be calm	But be not sluggish.
7.	Be brave	But be not roguish.
8.	Live in family	But become not a slave to lust.
9.	Be detached	But do not escape into woods.
10.	Seek the wise	But hate not the wicked.

2. In the Presence of Sri Gnanananda*

By K. N. SUBRAMANIAM

WHEN all around there are only darkness and stillness, there are both Light and Life in a shrine amidst a mango-grove.

A few Brahmins are chanting Vedic hymns with folded hands.

The eyes of all those present, men and women, are fixed on the Saint in saffron robes, who is sitting before them, by the side of the sanctum.

It is Sage Sri Gnanananda and the place is Tapovanam.

There is still a long time for the sun's rays to illumine the eastern horizon. This is just the time, which the ancients call 'brahma muhurtha' — the auspicious time conducive for holy thoughts.

The Sage looks deeply absorbed. There is least trace of motion in the body. The presence of people does not impinge on His consciousness. His mind only registers the presence of people around but does not react to it. It is just a witness to a scene but not a participating agent.

The chanting goes on.

The movements of persons and chantings steadily make a greater and greater impact on the Sage's mind. The senses begin to throb with life. The tongue utters involuntarily 'Om', 'Om'. Eyes sparkle and glances shoot across the hall. The hand takes a stick and strikes the bell hanging above with marked precision.

* Reproduced from the book titled "The Faith of Sri Gnanananda"

The Sage retires and returns to the shrine after a short while.

His presence now engenders intense activity. One attendant takes a cue from the motion of His head and brings in big lamps. Another one pours oil and lightens all of them. The Sage's hands sort out the different garlands and flowers offered by the devotees and selects the best ones among them and puts them by. A devotee prostrates before Him and a mild motion of His head sets him on an errand. A child begins crying. The Sage spots the child and gives it a plantain fruit. Several children come forward and each one is given a fruit.

Attendants busy themselves with decorating the place with available garlands. The picture of Sri Sankara, in front, invites the Sage's attention and He gives to an attendant a garland for decorating it.

The devotee sent on errand brings a box containing two pairs of sandals. The sandals are placed on a decorated 'peeta'. The Sage with His own hands gives the chosen garlands, flowers and fruits for decorating the sandals. His looks, now and then, get fixed on the Sandals.

The songs that are recited reach a pause and the Sage indicates the song that should be sung next. He sees betel leaves in the offerings, puts them by and sees an attendant standing at a distance. The attendant, with his reddish lips proclaiming that he is a betel addict, comes and takes them. The offerings are further sorted. Sweets, if any, are made over to children — camphor and bathis to the priest and flowers to ladies. An inmate anxiously looks at the Sage from at a distance and receives a look from the Sage — he has got the permission now, which he sought, for departure. Another inmate hesitantly walks towards the Sage. Two or three words, audible only to him, send him back. They contain all the instructions he needs —

what are the items that are to be prepared in the kitchen and for how many.

Shortly, worship of the Padukas commences and the mind of the Sage slowly draws within.

This may strike one as a needless description of irrelevant things. It is only seemingly so.

What is action and what is inaction is said to be a matter in which even the wise get deluded. (Gita — 4–16). The happenings in the presence of Sri Gnanananda are an elucidation of this abstruse point.

Again, utter inaction and intense action are thought to be opposites. That they are not so is apparent from Gita which speaks of both Naishkarmya siddhi and Yoga of Karma.

Yoga has been further defined in Gita as dexterity in action (Yogah karmasu kowsalam). In the presence of Sri Gnanananda one gets all the clarifications one needs to understand what is dexterous action and what is inaction and how they are compatible with each other.

Fittingly, the author of Sri Gnanananda Gurusthava Dasaka extols Him as one who deeply evinces interest in all endeavours. (Sarvakarya samuthsaham Gnanananda Gurum bhaje).

After meals, all retire. The Sun reaches the meridian. Members of a family alight from a bus at the gate of Tapovanam. Their haggard looks show, that they have travelled from early morning. They are very anxious to have darshan of the Sage. They make enquiries and entreaties. They are told that the Sage has retired and might not come out now. They cannot hide their disappointment. They have not taken food but they will not think of it now. They remain looking at each other for a while. A voice from behind makes them turn round. "From where? Have you all taken food?" are the words

which the visitors hear even before they can see the person speaking to them. The Saint comes in quick steps towards them, allows them to pay respects, does not expect a reply for His enquiry and asks them to go to the kitchen and take food without delay.

A little later, the bells in the shrine suddenly send out calls and devotees rush to the shrine. The Sage remains sitting. Devotees pay respects and the Sage bids them to sit. The hands of the Sage involuntarily sort out the fruits and flowers.

A couple nervously approach Him. Shy they are, their wish does not find a ready expression. The Sage fixes His look on them and says "Let us pray. Soon, God will give a child." With immense relief, the couple prostrate again and retire.

A middle-aged man stands with folded hands. He narrates the tale of his consistent failures in business and consequent struggle for livelihood. "I intend starting a new venture. Will I succeed, Swamiji?" He asks. "If you manage it well, you will succeed" replies the Saint. A sense of disappointment pervades the visitor's face. The Saint is telling the obvious, he thinks. The Saint looks at the visitor and gives a fruit to him saying "Take proper efforts. . . . God will help. . . .There will be success." The visitor's face brightens up.

A wandering Sadhu approaches the Saint. He is ill-clad and hungry. He does not know Tamil nor others present know the language he speaks. He feels helpless and yet goes on speaking in the only language he knows.

The Sage keenly listens to him. Suddenly the Sadhu's face reveals a mild surprise. The Sage makes detailed enquiries in the language of the Sadhu. The Sage speaks with ease and even sings a line or two from a familiar song

in that language. The Sadhu is overjoyed. An attendant receives from the Sage an instruction. A new cloth is brought for the Sadhu and he is taken for meals.

Inmates commence singing. The Sage is more sober now. He bids an inmate to sing a particular song. The song contains the gist of Gita — the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. The Sage's mind follows the dialogue. Sri Arjuna enquires about the nature and conduct of Realised Souls. The Sage gets stirred. Tears gather in His eyes. From now on the devotees hear an impassioned speech — in which similies and stories, songs and sayings come crowding in. The saints of all climes are the theme. The Sage yields Himself to the moment and does not quite care whether the listeners make out all the points He makes. The listeners may not fully understand but at the end of the discourse, they feel infused with a new spirit.

Dusk sets in and stillness descends on the shrine.

The new visitors have not quite got over the impact the day's events have made on them. Their minds keep dwelling on them.

The Sage retires.

The mind that has been taxed fully needs to be humoured too. The Sage makes innocent fun at the expense of the women around and heartily enjoys it. He fondles a baby, plays with it and sings for it.

All these acts of the Sage are but a prelude.

As darkness thickens, the mind performs its final act.

It has grown weary of the earth and the earthly. It takes leave of both.

The mind now longs for the Divine, makes a fond embrace of It and finally loses itself into It.

It is out of ignorance, some think that this Sage does not teach much. He is all the time teaching by His doings.

He is not seen performing any miracle. But one miracle He seems to be an adept in performing. He effectively removes from the mind the miracle-mongering trait — which perhaps even miracle-performers may not perform.

He is the River of Grace that had its origin in the mountain called Sivaratnagiri and which now courses through the devotees' hearts to be in perpetual union with the Ocean of Wisdom.

He is an image of beauty to a poet's eye, an enigma to a casual visitor, a fathomless ocean to an enquiring mind, an open secret to a loving heart, but the bare Reality to a contemplating soul.

The Truth is simple in its heights and He prefers to teach in simple ways.

His look has a message and movement an instruction.

To him, devotion to Guru was quest for the Supreme and attainment of Guru's Grace was abidance in the Supreme.

He knows the worth of the jewel in His heart and is not eager to encash it.

He accepts all Religions, worships all Gods and His kinship is with entire creation.

He has a heart that stands firm like a rock against all disasters but it melts at the sight of the suffering of a devotee.

He is content with the things the tide of time brings for Him and willingly parts with them at the turn of the tide.

He little cares whether the generation adequately understands Him and adequately honours Him. He will be content with the adoration of ages which waits for Him.

He is an alchemist, but He does not transmute base metal into gold. He transmutes the heart riven through dejection into one that exudes confidence, a mind destitute of will into one with firm resolve, an aimless existence into

purposeful striving and a sinful disposition into saintly dispassion.

May the Waters of this River of Grace inundate the Land.

Sivarathnagirisambhuta gnanasagaragamini
Punathu bhuvanam punnya Sri Gnanananda mahanadi.

OM TAT SAT

3. Sri Gnanananda Guru Stava Dasakam

(A devotional hymn of Ten Verses on Sadguru Sri Gnanananda)

Introduction

THIS is a unique composition by Pandit P. S. Sastri of Salem, which has for its theme Sadguru Swami Sri Gnanananda Giri, one of the greatest and most authentic spiritual personages of the present day, who lived to a phenomenally long and yet undetermined age, established an ashram at Tapovanam near Tirukoilur in South Arcot District of Tamil Nadu and attained Mahasamadhi in January 1974. It describes in ten beautiful verses Sri Gnanananda as a Guru *par excellence*, in terms of the well-known ideals enshrined in our Vedantic tradition.

Iswara pranidhana or surrender to Iswara or God, which is one of the five niyamas or observances prescribed by Patanjali in his Yoga Aphorism II.32, is also referred to by him as a means for attaining Samadhi (Sutras I.23 and II.45). Here, resignation to God is more than the effort of the surface-mind of an ordinary religious man to resign himself to the Will of God, who is supreme in the world He rules. It commences with the mental assertion "Not my will, but Thy will be done" and then takes the form of constant effort to bring about a continuous recession of consciousness from the level of the ego personality which is the seat of 'I'-consciousness into the Consciousness of the Supreme, whose Will is working out in the manifested world. Thus, para vairagya or higher dispassion (which is

detachment from the play of gunas of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas) is developed, bonds of the heart are broken i.e., the desires of the ego personality which cause the vrittis or mental modifications are destroyed and the mind is naturally poised in the state of Samadhi. Guru is considered verily as the manifestation of the Godhead. Total surrender to Guru, as that to Iswara helps one to attain the same goal of overcoming ego-consciousness.

Patanjali also refers in his aphorism III.24 to the rationale of the well-accepted law of psychology that if we meditate on any virtue persistently, it tends to become more and more a part of our character. For a beginner who is yet to acquire steadiness of mind, it will be difficult to meditate on any abstract quality. Moreover, the association of a beloved human or Divine personality with a good virtue increases enormously the attractive power of that Kalyana guna or auspicious quality. Its influence on our life will be very marked, as the very embodiment of that virtue is before us exhorting us to follow his footsteps and pointing out that His glorious achievement will be within our reach also, if only it is pursued with sincerity and faith. Above all, the earnest meditation on such a great Soul, who has conquered all human passions, transcended all limitations and attained Liberation while alive, puts us in rapport with him and brings about a flow of power and influence which accelerates our spiritual progress. This is indicated by Patanjali in his Sutra I.37: "Also the mind fixed on those who are free from attachment (acquires steadiness)."

Thus when we meditate on the auspicious qualities of Iswara or of the Guru and adore Him with all our heart, we actually grow into His image. This is the *raison de etre* why in the Vedantic texts the Jivanmukta-lakshanas or the marks or indicia of the Liberated One are outlined in great detail, so that the aspirant may trace them in his

own Guru, meditate on them and encouraged by the living example of the Master, develop in himself the same attitudes and disposition.

In the Upanishads which mark the culmination of Indian thought, Moksha or Liberation is not an eschatological (state after death) ideal resting on mere speculation or dogma. The positivist thought of Vedanta has brought it within the ambit of experience and verification as Jivanmukti or Liberation while alive. This glowing ideal points far beyond mere intellectual conviction which is often mistaken for philosophy and yet by keeping within the sphere of experience, it avoids the dogma of Moksha understood in the eschatological sense. Vedanta is thus not speculative philosophy unconnected with practical life. It is a way of living in the level of our true consciousness.

Moksha understood in this manner is not the result of mere acquisition of mental knowledge or of just self-discipline. It is a certain immediate experience resulting from both. Jivanmukti is the change in consciousness and the resultant attitude of mind towards life and the world. Therefore, if the teaching of Upanishadic philosophy should serve as a true guide in life, it should emanate from an experienced conviction in the Preceptor as otherwise it will be, as Katha Upanishad says, the blind leading the blind. The Upadesa or the precept of the Guru should evoke a corresponding anubhava or experience in the disciple. Sankara in a celebrated verse in Satasloki refers to this extraordinary power of Guru to transform the disciple into one like Himself. Guru's Grace, he says, surpasses even the magic touch of the alchemist or the philosopher's stone, which can only transmute a base metal into gold but cannot impart to it the transmuting quality itself.

Self-effort, however valuable in itself, is not an adequate

means of ascertaining the Truth so profound, which as unity of all reality is so much at variance with common experience. The living voice of Preceptor who lives what He teaches, has certainly a better chance of producing conviction than the written word. Moreover, orthodox opinion insists that the ultimate Truth can be known for certain only through Scriptures. For certainty in such matters, we should rely on Revelation and Revelation alone.

To realise the secret of the Vedas which reveal the nature of Atman or Self and to make it a part of his consciousness, one must have an unbounded faith in Scriptures and unswerving faith in the Guru who imparts to him the instruction and guides his spiritual effort. Veda literally means 'wisdom'. The sacred Word, which we now call Veda derives its sanctity and authority from its being the Revelation of the seers. Upanishads or Vedanta or the conclusion of the Vedas contain more than revealed truths to be transmitted through the medium of concepts and words, although experience has to be passed on to others inevitably and unavoidably through them, atleast in the earlier stage. The Upanishadic seer is much less the man who 'knows this or that', than the man who 'knows thus (Evam)', as the Upanishads constantly reiterate, calling him Evamvid. He is one who has acquired a new way of knowing, a new illumination which makes him perceive things quite differently. His testimony of experience which is Revelation is reducible to our own intuition and spiritual insight. Swami Abhishiktananda, the illustrious French disciple of Sadguru Sri Gnanananda, says: "It (Upanishadic teaching) is essentially a matter of passing on an experience of oneself, which does not convey any new information, so to speak, but which is much more an awakening to an unsuspected depth in oneself, an awakening to one-self, to

things, to the mystery which, when projected, is called God. It is an experience, a discovery which according to Indian tradition goes back to the awakening and enlightenment of the early Rishis who lived in the forests on the banks of the Indus and at the foot of the Himalayas. He alone can pass on this experience who has known it himself, who has been awakened within, the EVAMVID, who knows THUS. "The Guru is one who is so totally free from his own self (separative ego) that he is capable of being at home in the very heart of his disciple and so of opening the disciple to his own Self, of awakening him to himself within the Guru's own Self-awakening. But this presupposes in the disciple the quality of Sraddha, of total faith. If he lacks this complete faith in his Master, the total openness of his being to the others, he will never make progress. How can even the midday sun shine in a room, if its shutters remain closed? The Upanishad can therefore only be truly communicated through this communion between Guru and disciple at the deepest centre of the Self." "As is the Guru, so are the Scriptures, the mirror in which man progressively discovers himself, comes to know himself in his innermost truth. The moment comes when the spark flashes between the two poles. After that there is nothing but pure light in which all has disappeared — Master, disciple and Scripture too. . . . ." (The Upanishads pp. 61–63).

It is, therefore, that Svetasvatara Upanishad concludes with the verse "If these truths (of Scriptures) have been taught to a high-minded person who feels the highest devotion for God and for his Guru as for his God, then they will surely shine forth (as inner experiences) — then indeed they will shine forth". (Svet. Up. VI.23).

Bhagavan Sri Ramana says:

"Guru is the Self. Sometimes in his life, a man becomes dissatisfied with it and not content with what he has, he

seeks the satisfaction of his desires, through prayer to God etc. His mind is gradually purified until he longs to know God more to obtain His Grace than to satisfy his worldly desires. Then God's Grace begins to manifest. God takes the form of a Guru and appears to the devotee, teaches him the Truth and moreover purifies his mind by association. The devotee's mind gains strength and is then able to turn inward. By meditation, it is further purified and it remains still without the least ripple. That calm Expanse is the Self.

The Guru is both 'external' and 'internal'. From the 'exterior' He gives a push to the mind to turn inward; from the 'interior' He pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in the quieting of the mind. That is Guru Kripa. There is no difference between God, Guru and the Self". (Maharshi's Gospel p. 35).

The famous sloka from Sri Sureswaracharya's Manasollasa (a commentary in verse on Sankara's Sri Dakshinamurthy Stotra) reads:

"Salutations to Sri Dakshinamurthy, who appears in the threefold form of God, Guru and the Self, who peravdes everything with his form like the sky!"

In this Dasakam or collection of ten verses, the author describes Sadguru Sri Gnanananda in epithets which signify Atman, Iswara or Guru. Standard Vedantic terminology has been used, which gives ample scope for meditation.

SRI GNANANANDA GURU STAVA DASAKAM

Verse 1

Swabhavachinmayanandam kripapoornam jagatpatim
Arishadvargajetharam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is full of compassion; His essential nature is Pure Consciousness and Bliss Absolute; He is the Lord of the worlds; He has conquered the six enemies (of spiritual progress) (Viz. Kama or desire, Krodha or anger, Lobha or greed, Moha or delusion, Mada or pride and Matsarya or jealousy). To that Guru, Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 2

Ishanatraya vidhwamsam guna-avasta vivarjitam
Sarvadevam sarvamatam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He has annihilated the three kinds of desires for sons, wealth and felicity in the celestial worlds; He has transcended the three gunas or modes of nature (Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas) and is beyond the three states of waking, dream and deepsleep (as their unchanging Witness); He is the Self of all; He is the Consciousness that is known through all cognitions (as illumining and witnessing them). To that Guru Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 3

Sarva kartritva bhoktritva niyantritva vivarjitam
Sakalagama samvedyam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is totally free from all sense of a doer, enjoyer and controller; He is to be properly known only through all the

scriptures. To that Guru Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 4

Srishtistithilayadharam gunagunavivarjitam
Sarvachaitanya sampoornam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is the Eternal Ground, the changeless substratum of (the illusory phenomena of) creation, preservation and dissolution (of the universe); He is beyond good and evil; He is the Consciousness and infinitude in all. To that Guru, Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 5

Nityanandam nirvikaram gnanabhava anubhodhakam
Sadalambam nityatriptam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is of the nature of eternal Bliss; He is the Changeless One; He reminds (His disciples) of His true nature as Pure Consciousness; He is given to constant contemplation of Brahman and is one with It as Absolute Existence, the support of all, and is therefore the refuge of good men; He is eternally satisfied. To such a Guru Gnanananda I offer my salutations."

Verse 6

Samsara sagaroddharam yogihridpadma mandiram
Mahabhavam suddhachittam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He rescues (His devotees) from the ocean of Samsara or transmigratory existence; He has His abode in the lotus heart of the Yogis (who are engaged in Gnana Nishta or devotion to Knowledge i.e., Nididhyasana, or are performing Upasana or meditation with the help of symbols,

or are worshipping Him adoring His auspicious qualities); He is a great soul, established in the glorious state of Sahaja Samadhi; His intellect or Buddhi is pure (and inseparable from Atman). To such a Guru, Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 7

Sri Sankaramsa sambhootam sachchidanandaroopinam
Nada bindu kalatitam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is an amsavatara or incarnation of an aspect of Sri Sankara, He is of the nature of Existence, Consciousness, Bliss Absolute; He is the supreme Brahman into which Bindu, Nada and Kala progressively merge. To that Guru Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations.

Verse 8

Nirgunam nirmalam santhamnirabhasam niranjanam
Niralambam jagatpujyam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is the Supreme Brahman Itself, the Absolute without attributes; He is eternally free from the impurity of ignorance; He is ever peaceful; He is free from illusion or appearances; He is eternally untaunted (by the upadhis or limiting adjuncts); He (being non-dual and Infinite) is without support; He is worthy of worship by the whole world. To such a Guru, Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 9

Param jyotiswaroopam tam sarvasakshiswaroopinam
Sarvakarya samutsaham Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is of the nature of the Transcendent Consciousness,

the Light of all lights; He is of the nature of the Witness of all; He evinces right enthusiasm in all good works. To that Guru Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Verse 10

Avadhootam mahatmanam muniyogisasevitam
Sanmunindrasiroratnam Gnanananda gurum bhaje

"He is an Avadhoota, a Turiyatita or Atiasrami who has transcended the fourth ashrama or Sanyasa; He is a Mahatma, a noble-Soul (who sees Atman everywhere); He is adored by the chief Sages and Yogis (as their own Atman) and He is foremost amongst the chief sages, even as crest jewel amongst the ornaments. To that Guru Sri Gnanananda, I offer my salutations."

Sri Guru Paramguru Parameshti Guru Prasadasiddhi dwara
Atmanubhava siddhir bhuyat kritarthosmi.

May there be the Experience of the Self by the Grace of the Guru, the Guru's Guru and the Guru of his Guru. I am contented having attained Fulfilment.

4. Idol of Eternal Bliss

(Translation by Sri S. RAJARAM of the Tamil commentary of *Sri "Anna" Subramanian.*)[1]

Mandasmita Mukhambhojam Mahaniya Gunarnavam
Madhurabhashinam Santam Sarvabhuta Dayaparam
Bhaktha Vatsalya Jaladhim Paramananda Vigraham
Gnanandam Prapannosmi Nirmala Gnana Siddhaye.

Possessing a lotus like smiling face,
A Repository of all Virtues;
Sweet-tongued, calm and compassionate towards
all sentient beings
An ocean of Love, to Devotees, O! Bliss Eternal!
Sri Gnanananda!
I prostrate before Thee for pure and
untainted Englightenment. —

Mandasmita Mukhambhojam: Halo of Smiling Countenance

Sri Gnanananda Swami's ever smiling countenance is like a fully blossomed lotus. Sri Sankaracharya, in his "Soundarya Lahari" praises Goddess Supreme as resplendent with Beauty — Prakriti Sarala Manda hasite. The sweetness which inheres in the Goddess stands revealed in her smile. Similarly, the ever smiling countenance of the

[1] The Tamil commentary by this erudite scholar and Devi Upasaka was published in Sri Gnanananda Giri Jayanthi Souvenir of 1971.

Swami is indicative of the overflowing 'Atmananda" He is experiencing within Himself. That enchanting smile exemplifies the proverb "Face is the index of the mind". When I met the Swami by good fortune, for the first time, I experienced a feeling that the Eternal, Auspicious Devi of my worship had herself manifested before me in all Her splendour.

Mahaniya Gunarnavam: Repository of all Virtues

The Swami is like an Ocean of all praiseworthy virtues. We find that the qualities ascribed in the Gita to a "Sthithapragna", "Bhakthi Sreshta", and "Gunathitha" fit the Swami perfectly. Only by meeting such great sages and enthroning them in our hearts can we understand with the aid of the light of their lives the subtle truths enshrined in the 'Adhyatma' scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads. Their inner meaning cannot be comprehended by merely reading the commentaries. Inimical towards none, friendly towards all, devoid of the thought of 'I' and 'Mine', even-minded in happiness and sorrow, forbearing, ever-content, patient, filled with real happiness, rooted in Yoga, self-controlled, of firm conviction and having the mind and intellect fixed in the Almighty — these qualities of a 'Bhakti Sreshta' are personified in the Swami. Whoever gets a darshan of the Swami would experience the ecstasy of seeing his 'Ishta Devata' in person. Even as Lord Krishna exhorts in the Gita "It is my conviction that the Gnani is the same as I".

Madhura Bhashinam: Sweet Spoken

Everything about Lord Krishna is sweet, says the song "Madhurashtakam" sung daily in the Swami's presence.

He who meditates uninterruptedly on a particular object becomes ultimately that very object. Because of the Swami's devotion to Krishna, everything about the Swami — His spoken word, His walk, His robes, His abode — are all sweet like that of Sri Krishna. Sweet is His word, His life, His abode, His smile, and, as His devotees enjoy this sweetness about Him, they worship Him as Lord Guruvayurappan Himself-incarnate, and thereby obtain boundless ecstasy. It is Sri Lalitha Maha Tripura Sundari Herself — the Treasure House of all Beauty — who manifests in the male-form as Lord Krishna. Only those who have had the pleasure of enjoying the sweetness and loveliness of the Swami's speech know this truth. Svethasvathara Upanishad enumerates the distinctive features of Yoga Siddhi as follows:

> Nimbleness, Health, Serenity, Absence of all mental agitations, Radiance due to purity of body and mind, and possession of a sweet and a transparent voice.

We find all these characteristics in the Swami.

Santham: Tranquility

Sri Sankaracharya extols the saintly souls in the following words in His Vivekachudamani:

"They are the peaceful and magnanimous saintly souls, who, expecting nothing in return ever do good to others, as the vernal spring to the world, and, who having themselves crossed the dreadful ocean of Samsara help others also to cross it."

We realise this truth when we meet Swami Gnanananda. Those who think that saintly souls lived only in the days of

yore and that they no longer are to be found, will get their doubts dispelled when they have the darshan of Sri Gnanananda. Great souls appear in all ages. It is a pity that only our lack of discriminating knowledge, yearning and good fortune that prevent us from meeting them and achieving self-realisation.

Sarvabhuta Dayaparam: The All Compassionate

Gnanis, besides rising to the heights in quest of the Almighty also descend to reach living beings. The Gita identifies them as 'Sarvabhuta hite ratah' — those who are actively engaged in promoting the welfare of all beings. The magnitude of the love the ignorant have for the limbs of their body can only be matched by the love the enlightened souls have for all sentient beings. Their even-mindedness springs from their awareness that everything is, Brahman.

Saint Thayumanavar sings ecstatically:
"Who is small — who is big?
Who are friends — who are foes?
Is there anything other than you,
the Life of all life in the here and hereafter,
who pervades the entire Universe?"

Saint Thayumanavar prays to the Almighty to bestow on him the discriminating knowledge which would help him to treat all lives as his own. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa says that the 'love' one has for one's kith and kin is 'Maya', while the love that wells up in our hearts for all living beings is 'compassion'. This compassion is the greatest quality of a Gnani.

Bhakthavatsalya Jaladhim: Ocean of Grace to Devotees

Our Swami is an ocean of Grace to His devotees. He suckles His bhakthas as a mother, her child. The number of devotees who daily surrender unto His feet to rid themselves of their incurable diseases and their endless mental worries, is increasing. They experience the alleviation of their woes and anxieties the moment they deliver themselves unto His Grace.

"Yam Yam Lokam Manasa Samvibhati
Visuddhasathvah Kamayathe Yamscha Kaman
Tham Tham Lokam Jayathe Thamscha Kaman
Tasmadatmagnyam hi Archayeth Bhoothi Kamah:"

Whatever world a Gnani, a man of pure understanding envisages in his mind and whatever desires he cherishes for others, that world he conquers and those desires he obtains. Therefore, those who wish to have their desires fulfilled attain wealth and worldly fame, and those who want to free themselves from their mental agonies, should worship the 'Atma Gnani', the 'self-realised soul'.

The truth enshrined in the above words taken from Mundakopanishad recalls to our minds the Swami and His Grace.

It is indeed our good fortune and the result of our past virtues, that the Swami has chosen to come and live amidst us, after a long period of solitude, to enlighten and enrich us by attracting all towards Him.

Paramananda Vigraham: Eternal Bliss Personified

Eternal Bliss or Brahmananda is attainable only by the Grace of Providence, by the boundless compassion of the

Preceptor, and as a result of our own past virtues. It cannot be experienced by some one else merely pointing it out to us. But, undoubtedly, we see the 'Eternal-bliss-incarnate' in our Swami.

True to what is proclaimed in Vivekachudamani, our Swami quenches the unrelieved thirst of humanity which is trapped in the wild fire of the cycle of birth and death, with his nectar-like speech delightful to the ear, sweetened by the enjoyment of the elixir-like bliss of Brahman, pure, cooling to a degree, issuing in streams from his lips as from a pitcher.

For obtaining from Him — Real Gnana, may we surrender unto Sri Gnanananda Swami who has an iridescent face and a gentle smile, looking like a fully blossomed lotus, who is an ocean of all virtues, who regales the world with His sweet words, who is tranquility itself, who showering His Grace on all wipes off their sorrows, and who is a sea of compassion to His devotees.

5. Gita Sara Thalattu

(*The Essence of the Gita*)

(An English rendering of Gita Sara Thalattu, a lullaby, composed by Sri VENKATANATHA in Tamil. Translated with explanatory notes by Sri K. N. SUBRAMANIAM.)

Introduction: The Bhagavad Gita is one of the principal texts of the Vedanta and it contains not only lofty wisdom concerning the Supreme but also instructions of practical value to a seeker of Truth.

Though it teaches Karma, Bhakti and Gnana, according to the level of the seeker, its real aim is to impart the knowledge of the non-dual Supreme.

But the Gnana-marga is very subtle to understand and many are the ideas which require careful elucidation by a competent teacher.

Sri Venkatanatha, the Vedic scholar residing in the village Thiruvamathoor felt an urge to elucidate these meanings which remain in an implicit way in the Gita and string them together in the form of questions and answers and present them in the form of a lullaby which a mother can sing, while rocking the cradle, to send the child to sleep.

The result is the composition called "Gita Sara Thalattu" (Lullaby of the Essence of Gita) which, while being eminently melodious, is a masterly exposition of the essential ideas of Gnana-marga through apt similies.

The rhythmic flourish in every stanza in the Tamil original has only poetic value and it has been left out and

the subject matter has been presented, as completely and clearly as possible, in the form of argument. — K.N.S.)

GITA SARA THALATTU

May we think of Sri Krishna, whose eyes are red and whose hands are adorned by conch and disc and who caused the rise of the Sun of knowledge which drove away the unreal darkness — which it was, that in a beguiling way, projected itself as the five elements, the four internal organs, the three gunas and the two deeds.

* * *

Sri Krishna! Thou art one who appeared as a supreme Teacher in order to impart the knowledge of Ultimate Reality which is capable of ushering in Beatitude. (1)

Though Thou wert only a Charioteer, You expounded the entire wisdom to Arjuna through Gita. (2)

Thou art one who made Arjuna fight by dispelling his fear, when he became frightened and nervous at the thought that the fierce battle would involve killing the near ones. (3)

Thus, Thou spoke to him: You say, Arjuna as though you are learned that the killing of near ones causes sorrows but enlightened men do not get deluded by it. (4)

Thereupon Arjuna implored You: If Enlightened men are not affected by death, instruct me in such a way that I may remain unperturbed. (5)

KRISHNA: Neither for you, nor for all the rulers here, nor for Me, if seen from the point of view of Truth, are there birth and death. (6)

ARJUNA: If birth and death are not for any here in the world, to whom else does this transmigration (birth and death) belong — tell me decidely. (7)

KRISHNA: Birth and death are of the nature of the body but it is eternal Self that is your real nature. (8)

ARJUNA: I do not see myself different from the limbs, pranas and senses. If I am different from these, tell me what my nature is, in such a way that I can understand. (9)

To Arjuna who averred that he could not see anything apart from the body, prana and senses, Krishna said:

Child, thou can't be (even) known by them. (10)

ARJUNA: If I am different from body, how do I come to be associated with it?

KRISHNA: It is through the chain of Karma which can only cause sorrow. (11)

ARJUNA: How could there be any Karma for it (Self) before it was associated with body?

KRISHNA: This is just like the succession of tree and seed. (12)

ARJUNA: If the body and the Self are different from each other, to whom does Karma belong?

KRISHNA: It is to the body that Karma belongs. How can it belong to the Self? (13)

ARJUNA: If the Karma is for the body, to whom does the fruit of Karma (pleasure and pain) belong?

KRISHNA: All the fruits of Karma are only for the body. How can they belong to the Self which is of the nature of knower? (14)

ARJUNA: If the Karma is for the body, how upon the destruction of the body here, does the Self undergo experiences in heaven and hell? (15)

KRISHNA: The experiences in heaven and hell are truly not of the Self; they appear as those of the Self through superimposition of the body, senses etc. (16)

ARJUNA: How are the actions of the body mistaken as those of the Self?

KRISHNA: This is on account of ignorance caused by the absence of true knowledge. (17)

ARJUNA: Does intelligence pertain to the body or to the Self?

KRISHNA: If distinguished from each other, the body is insentient and Brahman is Intelligence. (18)

ARJUNA: If this body is insentient, how can Karma belong to it?

KRISHNA: It is on account of its (body's) existence in the presence of Supreme Effulgence. (19)

ARJUNA: Even if it is due to such presence, how can there be Karma for an insentient thing?

KRISHNA: It is just like an iron needle (functioning) before a magnet. (So there can be Karma for an insentient thing.) (20)

ARJUNA: If these actions are for the body, to whom do the experiences of pleasure and pain belong?

KRISHNA: Even those pleasure and pain are only for the body. (21)

ARJUNA: If the experiences of pleasure and pain are not those of the sentient Self, tell me, how can they ever belong to the inert body? (22)

KRISHNA: Among the entities — five elements, five airs, ten senses, four internal organs like the mind, which constitute the two bodies — outer and inner — the pleasure and pain pertain to the mind. (23)

ARJUNA: What is the cause of the two bodies (Sthula sarira and Sukshma sarira)?

KRISHNA: Including their prime cause (Agnana) there are three bodies. (24)

ARJUNA: You said that mind is aware of pleasure and pain as they come, but, upon enquiry, it also appears to be insentient. (25)

KRISHNA: It is because the mind is identified with Self, as it were that the mind perceives pleasure and pain. (26)

ARJUNA: How is it that the experiences of pleasure and pain of the mind, instead of appearing as belonging to the mind, appear as those of the Self? (27)

KRISHNA: It is just like the heat of the fire passing on to the water inside the vessel placed upon it and appearing as that of the water. (28)

ARJUNA: The Self is consciousness and mind is inert matter. How do they become identified with each other? (29)

KRISHNA: Like the hard iron which appears as one with fire (in a red hot iron ball) the mind also appears as identical with Self. (30)

ARJUNA: Why is it that the mind takes the form of the Self and its attributes appear as those of the Self?

KRISHNA: It is because of the absence of discriminating knowledge in mind. (31)

ARJUNA: Will these attributes appearing as those of the Self ever leave it?

KRISHNA: This is just like the redness of the red rose appearing in a crystal (as belonging to it though it is imaginary). (32)

ARJUNA: If the Self is pure in nature, like crystal, why does the blemish of desire appear in it? (33)

KRISHNA: The blemish of desire appears in the Self on account of impressions carried over from a beginningless time and there is no emancipation as long as there is identification with the mind. (34)

Thereupon, Arjuna bowed at the holy feet of Krishna and sought to know clearly what is bondage and what is release. (35)

KRISHNA SPAKE: Identification with body etc., constitutes bondage and abandonment of this identification is what leads to great Liberation. (36)

ARJUNA: How does the identification arise and how does it leave? Clarify out of compassion for me. (37)

KRISHNA: Ignorance, which is unawareness of the nature of Self is what causes the identification to arise and upon the extinction of ignorance, identification ceases to exist. (38)

ARJUNA: Do Thou mercifully tell me, how this ignorance takes hold of the Self and how does it leave? (39)

KRISHNA: Agnana (ignorance) exists from a beginningless time and (as such) it is not said to come into existence at any point of time, but it surely disappears when the knowledge of Truth dawns. (40)

ARJUNA: Darkness cannot appear before the Sun and how can agnana come to exist in the Self which is luminous? (41)

KRISHNA: When there is this realisation, there is no longer agnana. There is only the vast expanse of Bliss forever, and this is what you are. (42)

ARJUNA: Even after the knowledge of Truth has been attained through Vedanta and Preceptor, why is it that pleasure and pain do not cease to exist? (43)

KRISHNA: The pleasure and pain never leave through mediate knowledge (paroksha Gnana). They certainly leave when the knowledge becomes immediate (aparoksha Gnana). (44)

ARJUNA: What is mediate knowledge and what is immediate knowledge? Elucidate them so that my mind may get a clear understanding. (45)

KRISHNA: The knowledge that arises from the scripture is mediate and the knowledge that is born out of the experience "I am Brahman" is immediate. (46)

ARJUNA: Even after the knowledge "I am Brahman" is attained how is it that the illusion "I am the body" does not cease? (47)

KRISHNA: It will cease when through hearing, reflection and contemplation clear realisation of the Brahman, which is only the Self, is attained. (48)

ARJUNA: If the consciousness is not already one's nature, will it ever become one's effulgent nature through reflection etc.? (49)

KRISHNA: Consciousness being one's real nature for ever, to forget it and seek to attain it is just like searching for an ornament which already one wears on the body. (50)

ARJUNA: Do I, at least after this enquiry, get rid of this illusion "I am the body" and attain knowledge of the Consciousness which is the Self? (51)

KRISHNA: When the body, which is different from the Self, is regarded as Self on account of past tendencies, what doubt is there in experiencing one's own true nature as Self? (52)

ARJUNA: The illusion "I am man" is not annihilated by the knowledge emanating from the scripture. How is it dispelled by the direct knowledge of Truth? (53)

KRISHNA: The shouts "light, light" do not drive away the thick darkness. But once the lamp is lit, darkness vanishes. (54)

ARJUNA: Since the ignorance is there in the Self from a beginningless time, how long a time is needed for it to be dispelled by the attainment of realisation? (55)

KRISHNA: Although darkness has remained in a cave for a thousand days, the moment the lamp is brought in, it disappears. (56)

ARJUNA: When there are such precious means like karma, practice of yoga and penance, why is agnana dispelled not by any of these but only by Gnana? (57)

KRISHNA: Darkness is not seen to be driven away by the use of weapons or march of an army but when the Sun dawns, it vanishes at once. (58)

ARJUNA: If Karma has not the efficacy to remove Agnana, how can it help in giving rise to Gnana? (59)

KRISHNA: Karma is of two kinds — Karma prompted by desire and Karma characterised by detachment. The latter kind contributes to the rise of Gnana. (60)

ARJUNA: So you have emphasised that Karma is also a cause (in the rise of Gnana). But how is this world transcended? Kindly instruct. (61)

KRISHNA: The world that appears in Me has been created, as though, through magic feat, like that of the juggler and is not real. (62)

ARJUNA: If the world is false, how can it appear in You?

KRISHNA: It can, as silver appears in a nacre. (63)

ARJUNA: The appearance, in a nacre, of silver, (known to be) actually existing elsewhere, is natural, but does the world exist actually elsewhere? (64)

KRISHNA: If the mind is in the grip of illusion even non-existent things will be seen, as a man sees himself to be flying in space in a dream. (65)

ARJUNA: You said the actual world is unreal like the dream world. On waking the dream world disappears, but why does the actual world appear as real always? (66)

KRISHNA: The actual world looks real until knowledge of Reality dawns. On the attainment of knowledge it will be known to be unreal, like the dream world upon waking. (67)

ARJUNA: You said that the actual world becomes unreal, like the dream world upon waking. Why then, after Liberation, does the world continue to exist? (68)

KRISHNA: The wide world appears, even as burnt cloth appears as cloth. For the enlightened men, however, it is not of actual use. (69)

ARJUNA: Although the effects of Karma and Agnana have been overcome (by the Realised man) why does not

the body, a product of these, immediately disappear? (70)

KRISHNA: Although a tree has been felled, it looks like a live green tree for some time and so even after karma has been overcome, the limbs act for sometime. (71)

ARJUNA: Some having attained Liberation, there are others who have to attain it — is it then that there are many Atmas? If so, what is the nature of Atma? (72)

KRISHNA: To say that there are Brahman, God and many individual souls is illusion. On the other hand there is only non-dual Self. (73)

ARJUNA: If there is only one Self, in truth, how does it appear as many souls? (74)

KRISHNA: Even as one Sun appears as many, when it gets reflected in the water in many vessels, one Self appears as many, through reflection in several intellects. (75)

ARJUNA: If like the Sun, Self also appears as many through reflection in every intellect, by whom is the Liberation to be achieved? (76)

KRISHNA: Bondage and Liberation are for the reflection in the intellect and not for the original Self. (77)

ARJUNA: As the non-dual Self is all-pervading, how can there be many souls in it?

KRISHNA: It is just like many bubbles appearing in an ocean. (78)

ARJUNA: Is it that Jivahood is the true nature of the individual soul which attains Brahmanhood and is that attainment supreme Bliss? (79)

KRISHNA: The Brahman is non-dual, there is nothing beside It and you are not different from It. If the sense of difference that causes sorrow is removed, the Bliss will become manifest. (80)

ARJUNA: Will that sense of difference ever disappear and will the consciousness be ever experienced as non-dual?

KRISHNA: Enquire into the state of deep sleep when the mind ceases to function. (81)

ARJUNA: In spite of the knowledge that there is no duality and the world is Brahman, why does not the world of elements cease to appear? (82)

KRISHNA: Although a man looking for water finds out its appearance in a mirage to be illusory, still the illusory water continues to be in his view. (83)

ARJUNA: Is there not difference on account of the existence of the knower, knowledge and the known separate from each other? (84)

KRISHNA: They are imaginary, just like the seer, seeing an object appearing in the dream while, in fact, there is only the dreaming man. (85)

ARJUNA: How do these imaginary differences disappear? (86)

KRISHNA: If the pure mind gets absorbed (in the Self) through the attainment of Turiya state of consciousness, the triad of distinctions will disappear. (87)

ARJUNA: If the luminous Self pervades the whole Universe, why does it remain hidden from my view. (88)

KRISHNA: Along with Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness) and Ananda (Bliss) there are also Nama (Name) and Rupa (Form) in a state of coalescence giving rise to the world and so the Self is not seen. It will be realised when the former three are known as the characteristics of Brahman and the latter two as those of illusion. (89, 90)

ARJUNA: You said "Realise Self through Knowledge". Is then Self, an object which can be known? (91)

KRISHNA: When the ignorance is dispelled by Knowledge, the Self spontaneously appears in the intellect. (92)

ARJUNA: What is the nature of the Bliss of realisation?

KRISHNA: Know it through direct experience, as in the case of sense objects. (93)

ARJUNA: Among the liberated souls, are there any besides those whose minds are lost in contemplation?

KRISHNA: There are, like the liberated soul Janaka. (94)

ARJUNA: What are the attributes of the liberated souls, their activities and the words they speak? (95)

KRISHNA: The liberated souls regard the birth, growth, expansion, contraction and death as those belonging to the body and will feel free from them. (96)

They will regard as belonging to the senses and organs the attributes of seeing, hearing, speaking, walking and receiving. (97)

They will be joyous in the thought that hunger and thirst are for the prana and fear, sorrow, pleasure, desire and anger are for the mind. (98)

Even if they ever live in association with home, wife and relations, they will be untouched by them like the water on the lotus leaves. (99)

Even if they are in association with their body over a long time, they will be distinct from it like the outer shell and the pulp of a ripe tamarind fruit. (100)

Even if they mix with the impure world and its ways, the realised souls wandering hither and thither will remain unsullied by them like mud-fish in the mud. (101)

Like the butter, churned from curd remaining distinct in the butter-milk, even if they function with the mind, they will not delude themselves thereby. (102)

Oh Great Teacher! Who, by using Arjuna as a pretext, taught so that all may get enlightened — may Thou go to sleep. (103)

Those, who with devotion read or listen to this exposition of truth, the wisdom of the Scriptures, which the Prime Being inculcated to Vijaya, will happily live in this blessed earth and also attain the Bliss which the liberated souls enjoy. (104)

OM TAT SAT

Explanatory Notes

The verse, within brackets, besides being a mangala sloka indicates the nature of the subject matter and the benefit it confers. This verse is not found in the Text published by Sri Gnanananda Tapovanam.

The next verse is also invocatory. The entire world of sentient and insentient things can be reduced into Five Elements etc. The five Gnanendriyas, the five Karmendriyas and the five Pranas should also be presumed to have been indicated by the term "Five Elements".

The tenet of Advaita Vedanta is that this world springs from Ignorance (Agnana) of Brahmanand if this Ignorance is dispelled through Knowledge of non-dual Brahman, there is liberation. If this Ignorance is real, the Brahman cannot be non-dual, for there is the existence of Ignorance besides Brahman. If the non-dual nature of the Brahman is to be accepted, the Ignorance of it should be regarded as unreal. The author, therefore, qualifies 'Ignorance' which is expressed through the word 'darkness' by the term "unreal". It is not real agnana but anirvachaniya agnana (agnana which cannot be determined as 'sat' or 'asat' or 'satasat' i.e., indeterminable) that is the material cause of the illusory universe.

4. Verse 12, Chapter II of Gita.
6. Verse 18, Chapter II of Gita.

The author begins to distinguish Atma from Anatma i.e., the Self from the body etc. The real nature (swarupa) of one is called Atma and this is what is indicated through the expression "I". The notion that body, senses etc., are the Atma is sought to be dispelled by the statement that the body is subject to birth and death but the Atma is eternal.

11, 12: Karma, together with avidya and kama (which cause karma), is responsible for the coming into existence of body and body in turn is responsible for the performance of karma. As one is the cause of the other, both should be regarded as existing from a beginningless time.

13, 14: The performance of karma and the enjoyment of the fruits thereof are only for the body and not for the Self.

15, 16: Even the experiences in heaven and hell are not for the Self; they are for the body that comes into being anew. However they are regarded as belonging to the Self on account of superimposition.

17: In adhyasa, the phenomenon of superimposition, there are two aspects — non-perception of the existent things as it is, and perception of it as a different thing. It is non-perception of the rope as rope that is responsible for the perception of it as snake in the illusory phenomenon. The author states that the unwareness of the real Self is responsible for misapprehending the body as the Self.

18: In the query, Arjuna asks about the nature of the body and Atma but in the reply it is said that the body is inert and Brahman is Intelligence. The author uses the word 'Brahman' in the place of Atma because the author wants it to be understood that Atma is indentical with Brahman.

19, 20: Luminous Intelligence can cause even inert matter to act.

21, 22, 23: Having shown that the Sthula Sarira is not Atma, the author shows that the experiences of pleasure and pain belong to the mind (which forms part of Linga Sarira) and not to Atma.

24: The anatma (non-self) consists of three sariras (bodies) — sthula, sukshma and karana. Since the last is the cause of the other two, it is called as karana. It is to be

understood that Agnana is that karana sarira, though the author has not stated it as such.

25, 26, 27, 28: Because of the mutual superimposition of the mind and the Self, the attributes of one appear in the other. To explain how the experiences of pleasure and pain, which belong to the mind appear as that of the Self, the author uses the example of heat of the fire appearing in the water.

29, 30: The Consciousness (Atma) and inert matter (mind) look like one as the iron-ball and fire look like one by virtue of superimposition.

31: The basic cause of superimposition is Ignorance of Self.

32: The qualities of one appearing in another are imaginary, as that of the redness of the red rose in crystal.

33, 34: Past impressions (samskaras) are also responsible for the superimposition. The immediate cause of desire is past impression. The basic cause of all bondage is only agnana. As however, only through mind, this bondage is experienced, annihilating agnana means primarily vanquishing the mind.

35, 36: The result of the inquiry into the nature of Self and non-Self is stated: identification with the non-Self is bondage and the absence of it is liberation.

37, 38: It is forgetfulness of One's real nature that is termed as ignorance, which again causes the identification.

39, 40: Though agnana cannot be stated to have come into existence at any time, it certainly disappears when Gnana arises.

41, 42: It is agnana to think that there is agnana and that it should be dispelled. How can there be agnana in a self-luminous principle? When this truth is realised, there is no longer agnana.

43–46: This Knowledge cannot be attained except

through Vedanta and the Guru. Even after it has been so attained, the question is whether all the miseries cease to exist at once.

Two views are advocated in the works on Vedanta regarding the nature of Gnana that arises from the study of Upanishads. The view of the earlier writers is that Sravana (hearing of the Upanishads) does generate aparoksha Gnana (immediate knowledge). But as 'aparoksha Gnana' remains blurred on account of doubts and wrong impressions, it has to be strengthened through Manana (reflection) and Nidhidhyasana (contemplation).

The other view is that the Knowledge that arises from the study of the scriptures and instruction of the Preceptor is Paroksha (Mediate). It is only through manana and nidhidhyasana that paroksha Gnana can become aparoksha Gnana.

The knowledge "There is Brahman" is called 'paroksha'; the Knowledge "I am Brahman" is called 'aparoksha'. The illusory notion "I am a man" can be truly negated only by the Knowledge "I am Brahman" and not by the knowledge "There is Brahman".

The author favours the view that the knowledge arising from the Scripture is paroksha in nature and cannot remove the illusory notion by itself.

47, 48: The author's opinion is that even after paroksha Gnana has been made aparoksha Gnana, the illusory notion does not disappear. The aparoksha Gnana (Immediate Knowledge) must be made aparoksha-anubhava (Immediate Experience) through repeated practice of Sravana, manana and nidhidhyasana and this alone is realisation of non-dual Brahman.

49, 50: It is not that what is not Brahman becomes Brahman through sravana etc. It is that which is Brahman already, that seemingly attains it through sravana etc.

51, 52: The real nature of the Self is only Consciousness.

53, 54: Aparoksha Gnana alone is capable of annihilating ignorance.

55, 56: Though agnana is anadi, it disappears the moment Gnana dawns.

57, 58: Gnanam alone is opposed to agnanam and not karma, penance etc. A thing can be removed by another thing only if it is opposite in nature viz., darkness and light.

59, 60: Karma is incapable of removing ignorance, but for that reason, it is not useless. Though Karma does not directly remove agnana, it contributes to the removal of agnana when it is performed without desire. Karma performed in a detached spirit with a sense of duty gives rise to purity of mind paving the way for Knowledge.

63: The unreal world can still be seen just as unreal silver is seen in a nacre.

64, 65: Silver is seen in a nacre because of the memory of actual silver seen elsewhere before. Does a real world exist elsewhere the memory of which can be said to give rise to its superimposition in Brahman? The author says that a thing need not actually exist elsewhere in order to be superimposed.

66, 67: Upon realisation, the actual world also disappears even as the dream-world disappears on waking.

68, 69: Even after realisation, the world continues to be seen and this is called "badhithanuvritti" — appearance of a thing even after it has been sublated.

70, 71: As long as there is prarabdha, the Jivanmukta will continue to act.

72: Having shown that the world is illusory and has been superimposed on Brahman, the question whether there are many jivas (individual souls) is taken up for clarification.

73: It is on account of illusion one thinks that there are several souls, God etc.

74, 75: Atma is not many but only its reflections are many.

76, 77: Bondage and release are not for the Atma but only for its reflection.

78: The Sun is existing in one place and the reflections appear elsewhere. In the case of Atma, which is all-pervading, the simile given in verse 73 is not satisfying. The author, therefore, now states that the many individual souls are like various bubbles in an ocean.

79, 80: Jiva does not attain Brahmanhood. He only becomes aware that he is Brahman, which he is always.

81: That the sense of duality disappears can be verified from the state of deep sleep.

82, 83: The idea, presented in verse 67 is presented in a different way.

The world continues to be seen even after realisation of Brahman, as in the case of mirage where illusory appearance continues even after true knowledge is born. As long as upadhi persists, the illusory appearance will also continue.

84, 85: The non-duality of Brahman is sought to be affirmed by further proving that the three categories of knower, knowledge and known are also unreal.

86, 87: In Nirvikalpa Samadhi the triputi — knower, knowledge and known — is transcended.

88–90: When the world is divested of Nama and Rupa, it will be seen as Sat, Chit and Ananda, which Brahman is.

91, 92: Any object of knowledge will be only inert matter. So, the doubt arises, whether Atma is also inert matter, inasmuch as it has been asked to be known. It is clarified that through knowledge Atma is really not known as an object. Only the ignorance concerning it is removed. Atma, by nature luminous, reveals Itself in the intellect.

93: The Bliss of Realisation is inexplicable.

94: Realised men may remain absorbed in contemplation or may engage in worldly activity.

95–98: The characteristics of body, prana etc., do not affect them in any way.

99: Though they remain in home, they are unconnected with it.

100: Though they remain in association with their body, they are really different from it.

101: The impure ways of the world with which they move do not affect their purity.

102: It is not that, because they function through mind, the mind will revert to old ways.

103: Sri Krishna is praised as the great Preceptor and Brahmachari.

104: The result of the study of this poem is described.

OM TAT SAT

6. Some hymns sung at Tapovanam

TRANSLATIONS of some of the hymns which the Swami was particularly fond of, or which were part either of the daily prayer or of the Guru Pada Puja or which have been referred to in the text of the book are given here.

(i) SRI GURU PADUKA STOTRAM

Song in nine verses paying Homage to the two Sandals of the Guru. The Sandals symbolise the greatness of the Guru (Preceptor). Each verse ends with the refrain "Namo namah Sriguru-padukabhyam": Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru!

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, the sandals which are resorted to by the lotus-like feet (of the Guru), which prevent delusion (and other weaknesses) caused by women, and which grant the series of desires of those bowing down in devotion. (1)

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, the sandals which have the power to grant the six spiritual treasures like inner peace (Sama) and so on, which are bent upon imparting the faculty of continued mental concentration (to the devotee), and which grant unflinching devotion to the feet of Lord Vishnu. (2)

The six spiritual treasures are Sama (inner calmness), Dama (Restraint over the organs of perception and action), Uparati (Withdrawing the sense-organs from their respective objects), Titiksa (Endurance of the pairs of opposites — heat and cold, pleasure and pain, love and hate, etc.), Samadhana (complete concentration on Brahman) and

Sraddha (Faith in the Vedanta as taught by a competent Guru).

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, the sandals which are like two little fish flitting in the stream of radiance emitted by the gems studded in the crowns of the row of kings bending low in salutation and which grant sovereignty (royal splendour) to those who bend low in devotion. (3)

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, which serve as a boat to cross over the endless ocean of Samsara (transmigratory existence), which promote devotion to the Guru and whose worship paves the way for the supreme sovereignty of renunciation (Vairagya-samrajya). (4)

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, which are Suns to (dispel) the darkness of sins, which are the lords of birds (eagles) to the powerful serpents in the form of the three kinds of afflictions (Tapa-traya) and which are capable of drying up the ocean of sluggishness (lethargy). (5)

The three afflictions are (1) adhyatmika — caused by atman (mind); (2) adidaivika — caused by daivam (fate) and (3) adibhautika — caused by animals or primitive elements (bhutani).

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, which are moons for (swelling) the ocean of Poesy, which are the rows of oceans for (quenching) the forest-fire of poverty, and which drive off the series of calamities of the submissive devotees. (6)

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, bowing before them even once, those stricken by extreme poverty would become lords of wealth and even the dumb person would become the lord of excellent speech. (7)

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, which destroy the serpents in the form of Kama (desire) and so on; which grant the treasures in the form of viveka (discrimination), vairagya (dispassion) etc., and which ensure wisdom and immediate Salvation. (8)

Kama (desire), krodha (passion), lobha (avarice), moha (delusion) etc., are likened to venomous serpents since they destroy man's happy life.

Obeisance, obeisance, to the two Sandals (Padukas) of the worthy Guru, which grant all the desires of those who worship them; which (being adorned) bear the (rosary of) rudraksa and whose worship promotes pure thoughts in the mind. (9)

Translated by Dr. C. S. VENKATESWARAN,
(Retd.) Professor of Sanskrit, Annamalai University.

(ii) GURUVASHTAKAM

A Hymn of Eight Verses in Praise of the Guru

SANKARA BHAGAVATPADA

One's body may be handsome, wife beautiful, fame, excellent and varied, and wealth like unto Mount Meru; but if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (Tatah kim, tatah kim, tatah kim, tatah kim). (1)

Wife, wealth, sons, grandsons, etc., all these; home, relations — the host of all these there may be; but if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (2)

The Vedas with their six auxiliaries and knowledge of sciences may be on one's lips; one may have the gift of

poesy; and may compose good prose and poetry; but if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (3)

'In other lands I am honoured; in my country I am fortunate; in the ways of good conduct there is none that excels me' — thus one may think; but if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (4)

One's feet may be adored constantly by hosts of emperors and kings of the world; but if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru what thence, what thence what thence, what thence? (5)

My fame has spread in all quarters by virtue of generosity and prowess; all the things of the world are in my hands as a reward of these virtues; but if one's mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (6)

Not in enjoyment, not in concentration, not in the multitudes of horses; nor in the face of the beloved, nor in wealth does the mind dwell; but if that mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (7)

Not in the forest, nor even in one's own house, nor in what-is-to-be-accomplished, nor in the body, nor in what is invaluable does my mind dwell; but if my mind be not attached to the lotus feet of the Guru, what thence, what thence, what thence, what thence? (8)

That virtuous person who reads this octad on the *Guru*, and whose mind is fixed on the sayings of the Guru — whether he be an ascetic, king, student, or householder, attains the desired goal, the state which is called Brahman. (9)

Translation of Prof. T.M.P. MAHADEVAN

(iii) TOTAKASHTAKAM

A Hymn of Eight Stanzas

TOTAKACHARYA

O Thou, the knower of all the milk-Ocean of Scriptures! The expounder of the topics of the great Upanishadic treasure-trove! On Thy faultless feet I meditate in my heart, Be Thou my refuge O Master, Sankara! (1)

O the Ocean of compassion! Save me whose heart is tormented by the misery of the sea of birth! Make me understand the truths of all the schools of philosophy! Be Thou my refuge, O Master Sankara! (2)

By Thee the masses have been made happy, O Thou who hast a noble intellect skilled in the inquiry into self-knowledge! Enable me to understand the wisdom relating to God and the soul. Be Thou my refuge, O Master, Sankara! (3)

Knowing that Thou art verily the Supreme Lord, there arises overwhelming bliss in my heart. Protect me from the vast ocean of delusion. Be Thou my refuge, O Master, Sankara! (4)

Desire for the insight into unity through Thee will spring only when virtuous deeds are performed in abundance and in various directions. Protect this extremely helpless person. Be Thou my refuge, O Master, Sankara! (5)

O Teacher! For saving the world the great assume various forms and wander in disguise. Of them, Thou shinest like the Sun. Be Thou my refuge, O Master, Sankara! (6)

O the best of Teachers! The Supreme Lord having the bull as banner! None of the wise is equal to Thee! Thou who art compassionate to those who have taken refuge!

The Treasure-trove of truth! Be Thou my refuge, O Master, Sankara! (7)

Not even a single branch of knowledge has been understood by me correctly. Not even the least wealth do I possess, O Teacher. Bestow on me quickly Thy natural grace. Be Thou my refuge, O Master, Sankara! (8)

Translation of Prof. T. M. P. MAHADEVAN

(iv) NIRVANA SHATKAM

Six Stanzas on Nirvana

SANKARA BHAGAVATPADA

Om. I am neither the mind,
intelligence, ego, nor citta,[1]
Neither the ears nor the tongue;
nor the senses of smell and sight,
Neither ether nor air,
nor fire nor water nor earth;
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness
— I am Siva! I am Siva! (1)

I am neither the prana[2]
nor the five vital breaths[3]
Neither the seven elements of
the body,[4] nor its five sheaths,[5]

[1] The seat of memory.
[2] The vital force that sustains life in a physical body.
[3] The various functions of the prana, or vital force.
[4] i.e., water, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen.
[5] The sheaths of food, prana, mind, intelligence, and bliss, which conceal Atman, or the Self, as a scabbard conceals a sword.

Nor hands nor feet nor tongue,
nor other organs of action;
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness
— I am Siva; I am Siva! (2)

Neither greed nor delusion,
loathing nor liking, have I;
Nothing of pride or ego,
of dharma or Liberation;
Neither desire of the mind
nor object for its desiring:
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness
— I am Siva! I am Siva! (3)

Nothing of pleasure and pain,
of virtue and vice, do I know,
Of mantra or sacred place,
of Vedas or sacrifice;
Neither am I the eater,
the food nor the act of eating:
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness
— I am Siva! I am Siva! (4)

Death or fear I have none,
nor any distinction of caste;
Neither father nor mother,
nor even a birth, have I;
Neither friend nor comrade,
neither disciple nor guru:
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness
— I am Siva! I am Siva! (5)

I have no form or fancy:
the All-pervading am I;

Everywhere I exist,
and yet am beyond the senses;
Neither salvation am I,
nor anything to be known:
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness
— I am Siva! I am Siva! (6)

Translation of SWAMI NIKHILANANDA

(v) UPADESA PANCHAKAM

Steps to Realisation

SANKARA BHAGAVATPADA

Study the Veda daily, diligently do the works enjoined therein and offer the same as a worship to the Lord, but turn away from works intended for the gratification of selfish desires. Wash off all sin and ponder deeply about the evil consequences of worldly pleasures. Assure yourself that you desire to attain the Atman alone and then make haste to set out from your place (1)

Seek the company of the wise, secure firm devotion to the Lord (Bhagavan), strenuously apply yourself to control of the mind and other practices, and then give up all ritual without delay. Approach a master who has realised the Truth and serve at his feet day by day; learn for the attainment of the One Imperishable Brahman and heedfully listen to the holy teaching of the Upanishad. (2)

And ponder over the meaning of the holy text that you have heard and follow the conclusion of Vedanta. Give up vain speculation but keep in mind the faultless reasoning approved by the Vedas. Meditate daily upon your identity

with Brahman (the Highest Reality). Give up pride, renounce the idea that you are the body and stop all disputation with the wise. (3)

Allay your hunger as though you were having medical treatment for a disease and eat the daily alms as you would a medicine; never hanker after a dainty dish, but be satisfied with what chance brings you. Patiently endure the pairs of opposites like heat and cold. Never engage yourself in idle talk. Seek holy indifference and cease taking sides whether out of pity or contempt. (4)

Sit comfortably in a solitary place, stay your mind on the Highest, vision the Self which is the whole and see how this universe is sublated thereby. Destroy all previous *Karma* and be not tainted by the subsequent *Karmas* by virtue of your realisation of consciousness; enjoy the *Karma* that has begun to fructify and then attain the state of identity with the Highest Brahman.

Translation of Sri Y. SUBRAHMANYA SARMA,
Holenarsipur

(vi) TATVAMASI PANCHAKAM

Pentad (five verses) on "Tat Tvam Asi". Tat (That=the Supreme Soul) Tvam (Thou=the individual soul or Jiva) Asi (Art).

The refrain is "That Thou Art, O King" (mentioned thrice to emphasize the idea of the identity of the Jiva (individual soul) and Brahman (Universal Soul).

Tat is Brahman — the supreme Soul. It is inconceivable and transcends the path (range) of speech and the mind.

It is realised in the Light of Discrimination devoid of the idea of differences and unaffected by the three gunas — tamas, rajas and sattva. That Thou Art, That Thou Art, That Thou Art, O King. (1)

All this Universe projected from That is impermanent like the world seen in a dream, the semblance of an elephant seen in a cloud or of water (mirage) in a desert. It is of the nature of extreme bliss and devoid of any form like the ether. That Thou Art, That Thou Art, That Thou Art, O King. (2)

The sportive creations of the intellect are the impermanent body, its attributes and the hundreds of cities conceived and created in the mind. That (the supreme Soul) is One without a second, endless (eternal), immeasurable and most subtle. That Thou Art, That Thou Art, That Thou Art, O King. (3)

That (the supreme Soul) endures like the rope that exists even after the disappearance of the erroneous notion of the snake (when true knowledge dawns). The bodies consisting of the five sheaths (kosas) undergo transformation (vikara or change). Even the sky and so on which are clearly seen do not really exist at any time (because they are projected out of It). That Thou Art, That Thou Art, That Thou Art, O King. (4)

The supreme Soul is that by which the concept of difference has been shaken off, by which the supreme joy that is already experienced is recognized. It is referred to in the scriptures by the aphorism So'ham (I am That (Atman)).That Thou Art, That Thou Art, That Thou Art, O King. (5)

Translated by Dr. C. S. VENKATESWARAN,
(Retd.) Professor of Sanskrit, Annamalai University

(vii) SRI DAKSHINAMURTI STOTRAM

SANKARA BHAGAVATPADA

He who through ignorance[1] of his own Self, sees the universe which is really in himself[2] as though it were manifesting itself outside, like unto a city released in a magician's mirror,[3] in the same way as one overpowered by sleep[4] (sees an external dream-world), and He who realises, on waking to truth, his ownself without a second — to that Sri Dakshinamurty[5] in the form of revered Teacher,[6] be this salutation! (1)

He who like a magician or a great yogin,[7] projects, at his own free will, this universe, previously undifferentiated like a sprout in the seed, into its present picturesque condition with all the variety caused by time, space and causation conjured up by Maya[8] — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (2)

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[1] The Sanskrit word 'maya' denoting the principle of ignorance as well as its effect, is here used for ignorance itself.

[2] The Vedantic doctrine is that the universe is, in essence, one with the Universal Self.

[3] This is a forceful simile intended to bring home the inherent self-contradiction everywhere manifested in the appearance.

[4] This illustrates how mere ignorance can produce a positive deceptive appearance with all the vividness of reality.

[5] This is the form of Siva in which He is said to have initiated Sankara and other saints into the highest truths of Vedanta. The name here signifies Brahman, the Highest Reality.

[6] The aspirant is to look upon his Guru as the very manifestation of Dakshinamurty. Such reverence will ultimately lead him on to the realisation of the one universal self, which now appears to him in various forms.

[7] The point of comparison is the spontaneous production of an effect without desiderating any outside material cause.

[8] Brahman or the Absolute Self cannot be considered as the actual cause of time or space for causality itself pre-supposes time or space.

He whose one radiance of reality manifests itself in things which are almost non-entities;[1] He who directly[2] enlightens His devotee by means of the Vedic text 'That thou Art'; and realising whom, one returns not to this ocean of recurring births — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (3)

He whose consciousness flows out, as it were, through the senses such as the organ of sight like unto the light of a big lamp placed under a pot with a number of holes, and in consequence of his light the whole world shows itself in the consciousness of the form 'I know this'[3] — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (4)

Deluded people ignorant like uneducated women and children, like the blind and the stupid, regard the body, the vital air, the senses, the flickering intellect or absolute void[4] as their self and engage themselves in vain violent

[1] Apart from the Reality which shines through them, these things are unreal; they are not, of course, perfect non-entities like a hare's horns. Hence the word 'almost'.

[2] The first two lines may be also construed as one sentence: "He who enlightens His devotees through Vedic Texts that they are verily that Brahman itself whose glitter of reality shows itself in empirical things which in themselves are almost non-entities."

[3] 'I know this' is a form of judgment whose contents are worth analysing. The 'I' is really the Pure Consciousness which was already there even before the modification of the mind; its egoity is a superimposition on the Reality. 'This' is the object, wholly a super-imposition; not self-luminous like the 'I', it shines by virtue of the light of consciousness derived from the 'I'. 'Know' represents the relation established between the subject and the object through this particular modification of the mind.

[4] Some Buddhists regard the universe as void of any reality.

disputations.[1] To Him who destroys this great infatuation due to the play of the power of Maya[2] — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (5)

He who owing to the envelopment of Maya is like the sun or moon eclipsed by Rahu;[3] He who, Pure Being in his essence,[4] is said to experience sound sleep owing to the withdrawal of the senses; and He who on waking recognises himself as having slept previously[5] — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (6)

He who reveals to his devotees, through the blessed Gnanamudra,[6] their own self which keeps up its self-identity through all the changing states such as childhood

[1] Though not knowing the truth himself each of them vehemently denounces the others as ignorant. The inability of every one of these disputants to hold his own against the attack of others thus invariably leads them to the inevitable position of the non-dualist Vedantin.

[2] It is only the grace of the enlightened Guru that can dispel the Maya of duality, the battle-field of all disputation.

[3] Owing to the Mayic phenomenal envelopment, the real nature of the Self is not easily recognized in dream or waking (see verse 8 below). All the same, the purity of the Self remains perfectly intact during these states also just as the Sun or the Moon is really unaffected by the apparent eclipse.

[4] There is really no change such as sleep or waking for the Self which is always the same Pure Being; the apparent functioning or withdrawal of the senses is solely responsible for our conception of the two states.

[5] This recognition would be impossible if the Self had been really reduced to nothing during sleep as alleged by the nihilists.

[6] The Gnanamudra of the mystic, ring-like symbol formed by the thumb and fore-finger, signifies the wisdom which the spiritual teacher can impart to the pupil. It is here intended to point out the unique method of Vedantic contemplation on the One Reality which as the witnessing principle in us, runs through the various states of consciousness.

and waking,[1] and for ever shines forth as the 'I'[2] within — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (7)

That Person who deluded by Maya sees in waking or dream the universe characterised by distinctive relations such as that between cause and effect, master and property, teacher and the taught, or father and son — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (8)

He whose eightfold form[3] alone — consisting of the earth, the water, the fire, the air, the ether, the sun, the moon and the soul — shows itself as this universe of animate and inanimate beings; nothing else than which Supreme All-pervading One, really exists for those who reflect — to that Sri Dakshinamurty in the form of the revered Teacher, be this salutation! (9)

Since in this hymn the universal nature of the Self has been revealed, one should constantly listen to it, think out its significance, and meditate upon the truth and then proclaim it to others. Thus would accrue to the aspirant identity[4] with the Lord endued with the supreme glory of

[1] All the physiological and psychological elements in us may entirely change or even disappear altogether as in sleep or death, but the witnessing consciousness remains unaffected.

[2] The basic consciousness which is the transcendental Ego, the Reality on which all other egoes, the waking and the dreaming egoes alike, are superimposed.

[3] This is one way of classifying the universe into the subjective and objective. The verse simply means that the whole universe is the manifestation of the Absolute Self.

[4] The immediate result of understanding the spirit of this hymn would be the recognition of one's own identity with the Universal Self.

becoming the Self of all. As to the eight-fold unimpeded supreme power,[1] it would accrue of its own accord. (10)

Translated by Y. SUBRAHMANYA SARMA,
Holenarsipur

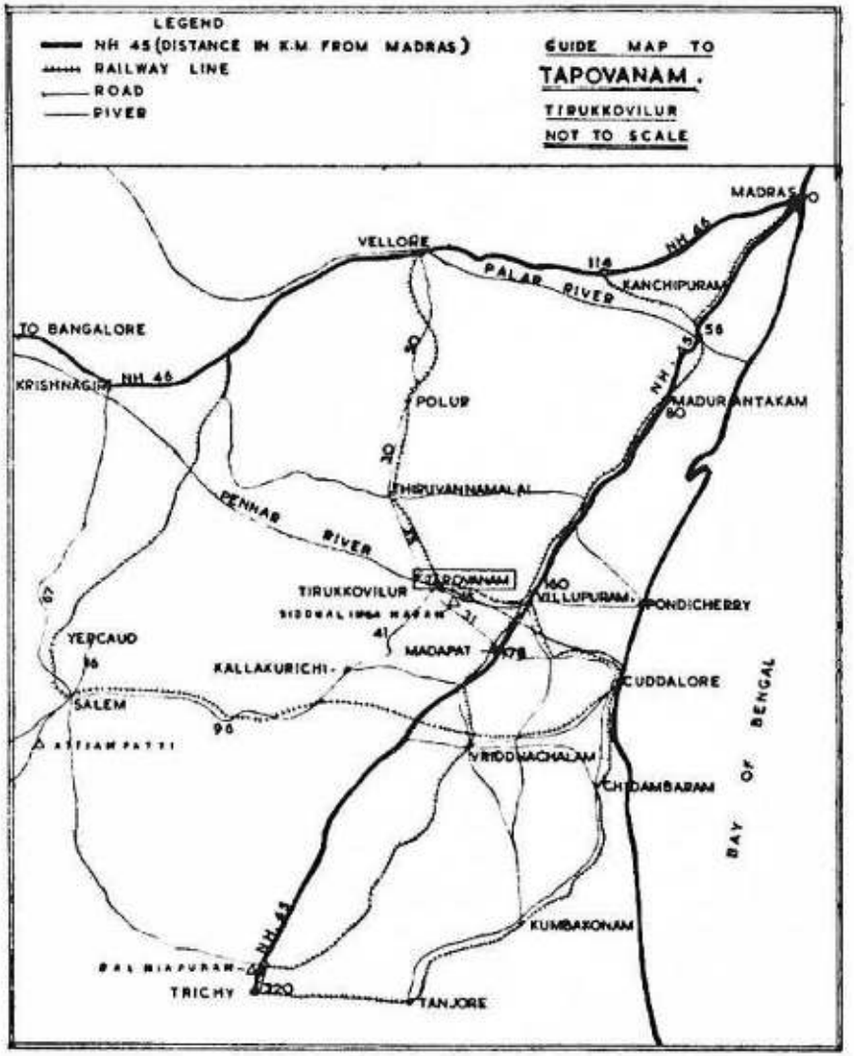
OM TAT SAT

[1] Eight supernatural powers are said to be acquired by the Yogin: Becoming infinitely small or infinitely great, excessively heavy or excessively light, reaching to the most distant object, perfect freedom of will, absolute independence, and absolute control of everything. To a person who has realised his identity with the Supreme Self, these are not to be acquired afresh, for he is the Self of all including the Yogins.

TAPOVANAM is located on the northern bank of the river Pennar, 2 km from Tirukoilur, on the Tirukoilur — Tiruvannamalai road.

It is 35 km from Tiruvannamalai, 45 km from Villupuram, 139 km from Salem, 173 km from Trichy and 210 km from Madras.

Quite a number of buses from Madras, Bangalore, Trichy, Salem, Tiruvannamalai, Pondicherry, Chidambaram, Cuddalore and Villupuram touch Tirukoilur from where one can go to Tapovanam by taxi, bus or 'jutka'.

From Madras one can drive on the National Highway-45 and turn to the right at Madapet, 19 km from Villupuram (and 142 km from Trichy). Tapovanam is 31 km from Madapet.

Travelling by train, one has to get down at Arakandanallur (Villupuram–Tiruvannamalai line) and take a taxi or 'jutka' to Tapovanam 4 km away.